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THE RUSSO-GERMAN ALLIANCE
August 1939-June 1941

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THE RISE OF ITALIAN FASCISM

THE RUSSO-GERMAN ALLIANCE

AUGUST 1939-JUNE 1941

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A. ROSSI

1950

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Translated by JOHN AND MICHELINE CULLEN**

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A la memoire de Paul Cavyn, Ministre plenipotentiaire de Belgique a Paris, Officier de la Legion d'Honneur et Croix de Guerre avec palmes au titre de la Résistance, Medal of Freedom avec palmes d'argent, Commandeur de l'Ordre de Leopold, qui au cours de trois ans et demi de travail commun, tout en poursuivant contre l'occupant une lutte quotidienne avec un admirable courage, n'a jamais cesse de penser aux conditions qui pouvaient faire de la victoire sur l'Allemagne le debut d'une ere de paix et de liberte.

FOREWORD

THIS study of German-Soviet relations during the crucial period between 1939 and 1941 was completed, in its essentials, well before the official publication of the documents discovered by the Allies in the archives of the Wilhelmstrasse (*Nazi-Soviet Relations*, 1939-41 ; Documents from the Archives of The German Foreign Office, Department of State, Washington, 1948).

A large number of these documents were consulted in the original German, as were many others which, while they have no direct bearing on German-Soviet relations, have helped us to understand them more clearly and to assess their relative importance both in the wider field of the political and military events of the period and in their general development.

So far as the German archives are concerned, we have drawn upon four main sources for this book : (a) the documents now published by the American Government, which will be referred to under the initials *N.-S.R.* ; (b) further German documents still unpublished ; (c) a number of facts which came out in the interrogation, under D. C. Poole, of the responsible Nazis in Germany ; (d) the documents produced at the Nuremberg trial, a large selection of which has been published by Messrs. R. W. Barrett and W. E. Jackson at the instigation of the American Chief Counsel for the Prosecution, Mr. Robert H. Jackson (*Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Washington, 1946-7, eight volumes, with one supplementary volume). These will be **referred to** as *N.C.A.*

There has, in the meantime, **been a prodigious output** of sensational material, which **the popular press has**

seized with both hands. This has not been ignored, although we have as a rule disregarded it. But with these purely mercenary effusions, other works have begun to appear which make an important and sometimes conclusive contribution to the study of the period under review, that is, the period from the beginning of 1939 to the outbreak of war between Germany and Soviet Russia.

The Nuremberg files are now being opened. The minutes of the meetings held throughout the war by Hitler and the chiefs of the German Navy (first Raeder, then Doenitz) have been published by the British and American Admiralties in a very limited edition. (*Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, Washington and London ; seven parts, from 3rd September, 1939, to 18th April, 1945.¹)

To this must be added Ciano's *Diary*,² which is of unquestionable historical value, although like all works of this kind it should be taken with a grain of salt. Its value has just been confirmed, and even reinforced, by the recent publication in the original Italian of the conversations of Mussolini and Ciano with Hitler, Ribbentrop and many other Government leaders and foreign diplomats between 1936 and 1942. (*L' Europa verso la catastrofe*,³ La Storia d'Europa dal 1936 al 1942, in 184 colloqui di Mussolini, Hitler, etc., Mondadori, Milan, 1948.) Special mention must be made of a volume of memoirs by an Italian diplomat, M. Leonardo Simoni, who from October, 1939, to September, 1943,

¹ The page references given in this translation are to the edition issued by the British Admiralty in October, 1947.

² *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, Heinemann, London, 1947.

³ Translated into English under the title: *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, London, Odhams Press, 1948.

was* attached to the Italian Embassy in Berlin (*Berlino Ambasciata d'Italia* (1939-43), Migliaresi, Rome, 1946).

These are only the main sources used ; others will be mentioned in the footnotes wherever acknowledgments are due.

We do not claim to have written the last word on this subject, for that would be a rash claim to make. But because of the quantity and nature of the documents available, it is now possible to settle numerous problems once and for all. It is these problems which we have endeavoured to sort out in this book.

Paris, July, 1948.

NOTE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

SINCE this work was written, a number of publications have appeared which deal with the same period and subject. They are mentioned in Mr. Max Beloff's book, which is a very conscientious and well-informed reassessment of the development of Soviet foreign policy up to the conflagration in July, 1941 (*The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, Vol. II, 1936-41, Oxford University Press, 1949).

The German documents published by the Soviet Government (*Documents et Matériaux se rapportant à la veille de la dernière guerre mondiale*, Moscow, Foreign Language Publications, 1948, two volumes) do not refer—and with good reason—to German-Soviet relations. The *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (London, H.M.S.O.) have not yet reached the period with which this study is concerned. And the Italian *Documenti diplomatici* covering the period will apparently not appear for several years. The reports and documents on the trial of the high-ranking Wilhelmstrasse officials at Nuremberg in the spring of 1948 will undoubtedly contain some new material, and it is to be hoped that they will be published in full as soon as possible. The few specimens we were able to examine not only confirmed that they were of great interest but left us with the impression that they will, on the whole, reinforce the general conclusions we reached in 1948.

Up to the present none of these conclusions **has been** invalidated by anything that has come to our notice from other sources since the book was written. **This** does not mean, however, that it **has not been found** necessary to modify certain details in **the** original

analysis contained in our first narrative. The earlier text has been revised as scrupulously as possible in the light of later research. This translation, through which the book is now made available to English-speaking readers, can therefore be regarded as a new and revised edition.

Paris, November, 1949.

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CHAPTER I

The suspicious partners. Hitler's Germany and Soviet Russia approach each other warily.

AFTER the collapse of Germany, tons of archives fell into the hands of the Allies. Some of the documents thus found have been used in the Nuremberg trial, and the rest kept for publication in the future. The preparatory work of going through and classifying this material, or at least as much of it as was found by the American and British occupation authorities, has, however, been completed in Germany itself. It has all been photographed, and preliminary reports have been drawn up.

The documents concerning German-Soviet relations between March, 1939, and June, 1941, are now known, thanks to the enterprise of the American Government. They allow historians to escape from the blind-alley where up to the present they have been caught between official reticence and party controversy.

To place the relations between Germany and Soviet Russia during this period in their proper perspective would involve going back to 1917 and tracing their evolution up to Munich. Such a task does not come within the scope of this study. We shall confine ourselves to a brief summary of some of the essential facts.

As far back as 1917 Germany was regarded by Lenin and the Bolsheviks as the keystone of their international strategy, and the whole foreign policy of the new regime at Moscow was dominated by this concept. The treaty

signed at Rapallo between Germany and the Soviet Union on 16th April, 1922, united the two countries in a common opposition to the Treaty of Versailles. Later, Germany began to evade the military clauses of this treaty by setting up factories on Soviet territory for the manufacture of war material, especially of aircraft parts.

The general line of Soviet foreign policy was not deflected by Hitler's accession to power at the end of January, 1933, and neither then nor later did Stalin cease to follow the "policy of Rapallo," even with Hitler's Germany. Hitler himself was still feeling his way and did not denounce the German-Soviet treaty of friendship and neutrality which had been signed in Berlin, under the Weimar Republic, on 24th April, 1926.

It was Hitler, and Hitler alone, who showed the first signs of hostility towards his powerful partner in the East. Stalin did not abandon his efforts to preserve peace with Germany, but he was forced to take precautionary measures in the face of this growing menace. Hence the entry of the U.S.S.R. into the League of Nations, the attempt to arrange regional agreements, and the pacts of mutual assistance with France and Czechoslovakia. The conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact, signed by Germany and Japan on 26th November, 1936, initiated a phase of grave deterioration in German-Soviet relations, which were at their lowest at the time of Munich.

After Munich began those first "oscillations" in the relations between the two countries which might have led either to a complete breach or to close collaboration. It was the second alternative which **prevailed during**

the first six months of 1939, thanks to the prospect of a "fourth partition" of Poland. According to M. Augusto Rosso, Italian Ambassador in Moscow, this possibility was already being considered by Soviet Government circles early in October, 1938.¹

Dazzling Light—Lingering Shadows

The documents which have been published and investigated make it possible to solve a whole set of problems in contemporary history which up to the present have either been a matter of guesswork or have been entirely overlooked. On certain points the light thus thrown is dazzling. On others there still lingers a faint area of shadow which later researches may dispel.

There will be gaps in the history of German-Soviet relations for a long time to come. Facts from now on accepted as indisputable in their essentials are still hazy in detail. The Soviet archives remain inaccessible to the "free" historians. But even if they were thrown open they would be far from telling us everything.

Double Diplomacy

The reason for this is that in Stalin's country as well as in Hitler's, but especially in the former, at least two "diplomacies" are apparent (and sometimes, in Russia,

¹ A. Rossi, *Obbiettivi e metodi della politica estera sovietica* Florence, 1946. (Extract from the *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, pp. 9-10.) M. Rosso was quoting the People's Vice-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Potemkin. His evidence can be compared with the forecast of a German-Soviet agreement, at Poland's expense, by the Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiosseivanov in mid-December, 1938 (*Documents Diplomatiques français, 1938*, Paris, 1939, P. 46).

three or four). There is the official diplomacy, and the other—or others.

When one glances through the documents on German-Soviet relations one is struck by the fact that the Russian ambassadors who succeeded each other from 1939 to 1941—Merekalov, Skvortzev, and Dekanozov—all played a very minor rôle. They crossed the background of the stage like dim ghosts. On the other hand, numerous Soviet agents, certain of whom enjoyed the personal confidence of Stalin and were his direct envoys, were very much in evidence at the discussions, only to disappear suddenly when Stalin himself or his *alter ego* Molotov took in hand the conduct of affairs.

For a long time such agents as Astakhov, the Chargé d'Affaires, carried out Stalin's orders, which were to make contact at all costs with Hitler's leaders and to smooth the way for an understanding between the two Governments. The activities of these agents are only partly recorded in the documents. Their orders were oral, and were performed with discretion, since they were groping about in the dark and were very much on their guard. If they succeeded, they were replaced by the official negotiators ; if they failed, they could be repudiated.

The same method was followed on the German side, although to a more limited extent. Schnurre, the commercial delegate, and Gustav Hilger, the Counsellor of Embassy, who had been born in Russia of German parents, worked side by side to prepare the ground* Ribbentrop and Hitler told their Ambassador, von Schulenburg, only what they wanted him to know, and in 1941 they even left him in ignorance of their real plans up to the last moment.

Since the two suspicious partners—Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia—wished to avoid showing their cards and giving away the lead, they often made use of friendly or neutral diplomats through whom they could throw out feelers. Moscow made one of the first attempts to sound Germany's intentions towards Russia, as well as the first offer of a non-aggression pact, through M. Draganov, the Bulgarian Minister in Berlin.¹ And in June, 1939, Ciano, then Italian Foreign Minister, passed on to the Soviet representative in Rome—by the method which might be called that of the "inspired leakage"—certain German proposals for a pact of non-aggression.¹

To all this were added the numerous contacts which industrial circles and the chiefs of the Wehrmacht kept up with the Soviet agents. These contacts were sometimes allowed to drop, but were never completely broken off. There was nothing official about them ; they were a survival between the two regimes of a system of collaboration which had become precarious in the course of recent years, but which could at any moment be fished out again to act as bait.

When did it begin ?

In the documents which have been listed there are signs of an attempted *rapprochement* between Germany and the U.S.S.R. immediately after Munich, and particularly after December, 1938.

Sometimes it was one, sometimes the other of the two partners who made a move—but it was always a very slight move.

¹ N.S.R., pp. 20-1.

² N.S.R., p. 54.

Hitler had a noticeably long conversation with, the Soviet Ambassador at the reception of the Corps Diplomatique on 12th January, 1939. Early in February, at a dinner party in the house of a prominent industrialist, General Keitel met the Soviet Military Attache who, alluding to the condition of Poland, remarked that there was the threat of a revolution there. If this occurred Russia " could not remain indifferent " ; she would have to intervene to " reorganise " those parts of the country adjoining her frontiers. General Keitel took careful note of the Russian's fears but abstained from expressing an opinion. He at once informed the Fuehrer of the conversation. But Hitler, as always when taken by surprise, adopted a sphinx-like attitude and simply asked Keitel not to spread the story.¹

Such moves were especially hesitant on the German side. The first trade mission to leave Berlin for Moscow stopped at Warsaw on 25th January, where it turned in its tracks and went back to the German capital without having reached the Russian frontier.

The sole reason for all this hesitation was that Hitler had still not decided on his policy. Until March his principal aim was to solve the problem of Danzig and the Corridor in agreement with the Poles by offering

¹ This information is taken from an article in the *Daily Telegraph* of 30th March, 1940, in which a neutral just back from Germany published an account of a conversation with a person who had followed German-Soviet relations from the beginning. He was reported as having said that " the first suggestion came from the Army, not the Wilhelmstrasse." The Army chiefs were the advocates of a *rapprochement*: " It was probably the Bismarck tradition and the threat of a war on two fronts which won them over." Admiral Raeder declared at Nuremberg : " I have always advocated Bismarck's policy of an understanding with Russia," *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, published at Nuremberg, 1947, official English text, vol X I V , p. 22a

them a share in the coming struggle to partition the Ukraine. This offer was made and renewed to Poland in October, 1938, and in January and March, 1939. Since in the end she never gave a definite answer (although in January Hitler's plans had appeared greatly to Colonel Beck), Hitler and his entourage, especially von Ribbentrop, began to think that if Poland did not wish to sacrifice Danzig and take a slice of the Ukraine at Russia's expense, they might just as well come to terms with Russia at Poland's expense.

There is not the slightest doubt that Germany did have designs on the Ukraine, and that such proposals were made to Poland. International Communism campaigned violently against the "criminal" plans of the "Hitlerite fascists."

Suddenly a voice with authority, the most authoritative of all, declared publicly that these were malicious rumours spread by the Anglo-French and American agents who wished to stir up trouble between Germany and the U.S.S.R. It was Stalin himself who acquitted Germany of such base designs, and he gave his assurance that Germany did not cherish any plans for seizing the Soviet Ukraine. He made this statement in a long speech on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union to the XVIIIth Congress of the Bolshevik Party on 10th March, 1939-

What was the reason for Stalin's sudden optimism? Why did he deny the existence of plans which he had had denounced for so long? Was he really so reassured about Germany's intentions? Not at all. He knew them better than anyone else. But precisely because he recognised the danger, he intended to avert it; and in order to avert it, he began by denying that **it existed**.

He could thus give Germany to understand that he was quite ready to seek an agreement with her, and that he had decided " *not to allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by warmongers who are accustomed to get others to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them.*"¹

It was a direct appeal to Hitler and his leaders, and the whole speech was composed for their benefit. If they chose to understand it in Berlin, a big step forward would have been taken and a new situation created.

Berlin understood very well. Certain passages from Stalin's speech were noted as a basis for a possible *rapprochement* with Russia. Hitler himself took up Stalin's metaphor about not wishing " to pull the chestnuts out of the fire " for the Western powers in his speech of 1st April at Wilhelmshafen, and Ribbentrop trumpeted it about in his memorandum of 12th April to the heads of the diplomatic missions in Europe.² In instructions drawn up on about 26th May, 1939, for von Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, he emphasised that in the field of foreign policy a " certain change " seemed to have taken place " *in the ideas of the Russians.*" In fact, the German leaders believed they could " *discern in Stalin's speech of March certain signs of a new orientation.*"³

When the non-aggression pact and the secret protocol

¹ J. Stalin, *Report on the work of the Central Committee to the XVIIIth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, London, Modern Books, p. 16.

¹ *Documents concerning the history of the origins of the war*, Auswaertige Ampt., No. 2, Berlin, 1939, No. 287, p. 113.

² These instructions were submitted to Hitler on 26th May. They bear the following directions : " Telegram of instructions for Ambassador Schulenburg at Moscow. Very secret.** They were found in the Wilhelmstrassc but do not appear among the dispatches received by von Schulenburg in Moscow.

were actually being signed in Moscow on 23rd August, 1939, Ribbentrop referred to Stalin's speech of 10th March. It included, he told Stalin, a phrase which Hitler had interpreted as expressing Stalin's desire for improved relations with Germany. To this remark Stalin replied: "*That was precisely my intention*"¹ And Molotov confirmed this in the toast which he proposed immediately after the ceremony. Raising his glass to Stalin, he emphasised that "*it was Stalin himself who—by his speech of March, which was well understood in Germany, had brought about the reversal in political relations.*"² In his speech before the Supreme Soviet on 21st August, 1939, in support of the ratification of the pact concluded the previous week, Molotov also recalled that Stalin had wished to launch an appeal on 10th March for good-neighbourly relations with Germany, and he declared amidst the gratified laughter of the assembly (which was recorded in the official report), "*We see now that Comrade Stalin's declaration had on the whole been understood in Germany, and that it has produced practical results*"³ To Molotov's testimony can be added Ribbentrop's, at the Nuremberg trial: "*Marshal Stalin made a speech in March, 1939, in which he expressed a desire to foster better relations with Germany. I informed Adolf Hitler . . . I learned soon after through the negotiations of Minister Schnur that Stalin had not used this phrase lightly*"⁴

There can, therefore, be no possible doubt on this point. Stalin personally desired an understanding with Hitler, and his speech of 10th March was a decisive

¹ *Le Monde*, 27th March, 1946, report from Nuremberg.

² N.-S.R., p. 76.

³ *Bulletin periodique de la presse russe*, No. 289, p. 5 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris).

⁴ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. X, p. 267.

step towards achieving it. His appeal was heard, and March fixes the turning point. Its implications had hardly yet been considered in Germany when General Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador, is said to have noticed it and to have informed his Government of its existence.¹ If Berlin seemed to hesitate it was because, towards the end of March, all hope of settling the Polish question without an open conflict had not been entirely lost. On the other hand, if Moscow, through the speech of 10th March, began to move unfalteringly on a course from which it was never to deviate, it was because Stalin had decided from that moment that Russia would not be involved in the coming war. And the whole of his policy was to be subordinated to this end.

¹ In a report on the Anglo-French-Russian negotiations presented at the secret session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate, M. Jacques Bardoux quoted the following excerpt from the Japanese newspaper *Kobe Shimbun* : " Last March, Lieut.-General Oshima informed his government that German-Soviet relations were constantly improving, so much so that the two countries were in a position to begin negotiations." It should be added, however, that up to the last moment Oshima believed a German-Russian pact to be impossible.

CHAPTER II

The Agreement in the making: March to July, 1939

As he told his generals on 22nd August, 1939, Hitler had at first contemplated a campaign in the West, and with this in mind had intended temporarily to neutralise Poland. Although he favoured this plan, it could not be carried out because he was confronted with the Poles' refusal to come to terms over Danzig and the Corridor.¹

Towards the end of March, after an interview in Berlin on the 21st between von Ribbentrop and M. Lipski, the Polish Ambassador, Hitler realised that his plan for an amicable arrangement with Poland could not be achieved. The question had to be settled, therefore, by force of arms. From that moment the problem of reaching an understanding with Russia became a practical issue and was linked in the minds of the German leaders with that of a fourth partition of Poland. In fact, at the beginning of April, Hitler is said to have confided to General von Brauchitsch, whom he had summoned to Berchtesgaden, that he was getting ready "to pay an official visit to Moscow."² At all events, it was on this occasion that he ordered him "to start military preparations for a possible campaign

¹ N.C.A., III, 581-2.

² H. C. Deutsch (head of the Intelligence branch of O.S.S. in Germany) in an article published in *La Bataille* on 30th April, 1947.

against Poland,"¹ and von Brauchitsch circulated these instructions in a memorandum dated 3rd April. The preparations were to be made in such a way that the operation could begin " at any time from 1st September, 1939."²

Hitler was resolved to discover what lay at the back of Stalin's mind, and to go about it with all the necessary determination and caution. Moscow was equally cautious. On 4th April *Pravda* reverted to the theme previously expounded by Stalin on 10th May, and once more France and Great Britain were accused of encouraging Germany to seize the Ukraine. On the same day, after the publication in the French newspapers of a Moscow dispatch alleging that in the event of war the U.S.S.R. had undertaken to provide Poland with military equipment and to withhold raw materials from Germany, the Tass agency " *was authorised to state that such a report did not correspond with the true facts and that the Soviet Union had neither given such promises to anybody nor assumed such obligations.*"

Britain and France Burn their Boats

Two days later, on 6th April, Mr. Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons the conclusion of a bilateral pact of mutual assistance with Poland. This decision came after the Anglo-French declaration of 31st March and preceded the Anglo-French *unilateral* guarantee to Rumania and Greece by barely a week.

These moves, which were **primarily** intended **to warn**

¹ Written affidavit by Marshal von Brauchitsch, *Trial of the Major War Criminals IV*, p. 404.

² *Trial of the Major War Criminals, I I I*, p. 217.

Hitler against being 'tempted into new adventures, had a decisive effect on Soviet policy and on the relations between Berlin and Moscow. Both Hitler and Stalin knew that war was inevitable. Hitler's own aim was now to isolate Poland as much as possible and to crush her before Britain and France could throw their weight into the scales. As these two countries had strengthened their ties with Poland, what he had to do now was to separate Poland from Russia. This plan had been maturing in Hitler's mind, particularly since the beginning of April,¹ and he threw out hints of its main outline at the secret conference with his General Staff on 23rd May, 1939 : "*It is not impossible,*" he told his generals, "*that Russia may be induced to take no further interest in the destruction of Poland*"² The only way of "buying out" Russia's interest in the fate of Poland was to make her "buy herself in" as an accomplice. In the instructions of 26th May³ already quoted, Ribbentrop wrote in paragraph 7 : "If, against our wishes, complications should arise leading to war with Poland, we are firmly convinced that this would not necessarily lead to a conflict of interests with Soviet Russia. We can say even now that *a settlement of the German-Polish question—whatever the method employed—would as far as possible take Russian interests into account*" The German Foreign Minister added a little further on in the ninth paragraph that he did not see what Russia could gain by associating with Britain since Britain was not in a condition to offer her "*anything in return which would make it worth her while.*"

¹ Hitler's secret instructions of nth April, 1939, had already raised the problem of the isolation of Poland ; *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. I, pp. 199-200 and I I I, pp. 217-18.

² N.C.A., 1, p. 393.

² See p. 8, note 3.

The Anglo-French decisions gave Stalin an unhopedor advantage. First, they confirmed his view that this time war was certain. Next, and most important, they placed the two Western powers in a position of inferiority towards Russia since, while they had now got caught up in the machinery and were therefore fully committed, Russia retained intact all her available resources and her full freedom of action. Britain and France were henceforth at the mercy of the first incident in Danzig or the Balkans, whereas Russia could defend her own interests, as Stalin conceived them, without being hampered by any mortgages or international obligations.

This was the underlying reason for the failure of the negotiations initiated by the British Government halfway through April between London, Paris and Moscow. They could not lead to anything, first of all because Stalin wanted at all costs to keep out of war—unless forced into it—and then because the British and the French no longer had any freedom of manoeuvre or of choice and because, as their hands were tied by their commitments, they had nothing to bargain with when they came to negotiate. All they could offer Stalin was a fight against Hitler "for freedom," with the risks which this entailed. Stalin, on the other hand, was no longer interested in "collective security" since there was a chance of his being able to "pull the chestnuts out of the fire" by reaching agreement with Hitler.

As the situation was developing into war, Stalin tossed over to the German side a bombshell of a different kind. During an interview which he had arranged with Weizsaecker, the Secretary of State, Merekalov, the Soviet Ambassador, informed him **that**

" Soviet policy had always moved in a straight line. Ideological differences had hardly influenced Russian-Italian relations, and they did not have to prove a stumbling block with Germany either. Soviet Russia had not exploited the present friction between Germany and the Western democracies against Germany, nor did she desire to do so. There existed for Russia no reason why she should not live with Germany on a normal footing. And from normal, relations might become better and better"¹

Litvinov is Sacked

To show Berlin that he had decided to make a clean break with the past and start afresh, on 3rd May Stalin sacked Litvinov, the choir-leader and commercial traveller of collective security. On 1st May he had already suppressed the *Journal de Moscou*, a French-language publication which acted as the mouthpiece of the policy of the Commissar for Foreign Affairs,

Hitler and his associates were greatly impressed by Litvinov's dismissal.² It was the second resounding blow struck by Stalin, and it was at the same time his way of carrying on an odd sort of dialogue with the German leaders—odd because it consisted of cautious probings and spectacular demonstrations at one and the same time. The documents prove that Berlin grasped the significance of this move, and it strengthened and crystallised the tendency there towards collaboration with the U.S.S.R. Hitler himself later told his generals on 22nd August, just before the Polish campaign,

¹ Report by Weizsaecker on his conversation with Merekalov, N.-S.R., p. 2.

² " Litvinov's resignation as Foreign Minister struck Hitler like a cannon-ball" Raeder documents, N.C.A. Supplement, A, p. 1,012.

that " *the replacing of Litvinov was decisive*,"¹ and in a letter of 25th August he told Mussolini that " *the readiness on the part of the Kremlin to arrive at a reorientation of its relations with Germany became apparent after the departure of Litvinov*"² Astakhov also called on Schnurre as early as the evening of 5th May and tried to find out if the blow had struck home, that is, if " *this event would cause a change in Germany's attitude towards the Soviet Union*"³

On 6th May, one of Hitler's intimates was said to have stated that Hitler " *would in future no longer consider settling the differences between Germany and Poland without Russia, and that we shall witness a fourth partition of Poland*"⁴ This information reached the French Embassy in Berlin and was from there passed on to Paris, but neither that nor any other of the numerous indications of what was in the wind were sufficient to make the French Government see the light. The same day Ribbentrop explained to Ciano, whom he met in Milan for the conclusion of the " Pact of Steel," that " *any favourable occasion which presents itself must be seized to prevent the adhesion of Russia to the anti-totalitarian block.*"⁵

Molotov Seeks a Political Agreement with Hitler

In the favourable atmosphere thus created by Stalin's gesture, the secret contacts between Berlin and Moscow were intensified.

On 17th May, Astakhov, the Russian Gharage

¹ N.C.A., III, p.585.

² N.-S.R., p.81.

³ N.-S.R., p.3.

⁴ *The French Yellow Book*, London, Hutchinson, 1940 ; Coulondre's dispatch of 7th May, 1939.

⁵ Ciano's Diplomatic Papers, p. 286.

d'Affaires in Berlin, told Schnurre that there was no reason to fear a conflict with Russia, and that they could therefore conclude the German-Soviet trade negotiations.¹ Three days later von Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, had a long talk with the new Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Molotov, who put the question in its real form for the first time : to have a successful outcome, economic relations between the two countries must be put on a political basis. " The Soviet Government," he said, " could only agree to a resumption of the negotiations if the *necessary*¹ *political bases 'for them had been constructed'*"* In a dispatch sent the same day Schulenburg summed up the conversation in these terms : " The result of the interview with Molotov has been that the Soviet Government considers economic negotiations untimely *so long as they have not been placed on a political basis*"²

Berlin received Molotov's " condition " with lively satisfaction, for it opened up some very tempting prospects to Hitler and his chiefs, and Ribbentrop noted it in his instructions of 26th May. After a reminder (in paragraph I) that in the recent interview Molotov had insisted on settling the political relations between Germany and Soviet Russia before going into the question of closer economic co-operation, and that " the Russian Charge d'Affaires in Berlin (Astakhov) had at various times expressed the same view," he went on to declare that the German Government saw no objection to Berlin and Moscow having a " frank discussion " on the subject.

¹ N.-S.R., p. 5.

² N.-S.R., p. 6.: von Schulenburg's memorandum of 20th May, 1939.

³ Von Schulenburg's telegram of 20th May (unpublished).

This condition was the key to the Soviet leaders' attitude, which remained the same until the agreement was concluded on 23rd August. For the benefit of public opinion, the two Governments continued to discuss "economics," but on 20th May Molotov determined the course which the negotiations were to take. When, in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31st May, he claimed for Russia the right to discuss "trade" with Germany and to sign economic agreements with her, we know that behind these economic agreements and arising out of them was a political agreement which the two parties were trying to arrange and which they had every intention of clinching.

On 30th May, Weizsaecker, the Secretary of State, made a definite statement to Astakhov that Germany was ready to begin conversations with the U.S.S.R.¹ Then on 15th June, Astakhov took a decisive step, the first, in fact, leading to definite negotiations. He informed Draganov, the Bulgarian minister in Berlin, that the Soviet Union was trying to make up its mind which of three courses to follow : *"the conclusion of the pact with England and France : a further dilatory treatment of the pact negotiations: or a rapprochement with Germany"* In so far as the choice lay with Russia *"this last possibility, with which ideological considerations would not have to become involved, was closest to her desire"* Astakhov added that *"if Germany would declare that she would not attack the Soviet Union, or better still, conclude a non-aggression pact with her, the Soviet Union will probably refrain from concluding a treaty with England"*²

¹ N.-S.R., p. 12.

² N.S.R., pp. 20-1. Astakhov raised the question of Bessarabia in the same conversation.

This was the first time that a pact of non-aggression had been mentioned, and it was the Russians who mentioned it. The Wilhelmstrasse considered it "important that the Soviets, through Astakhov, *had taken the initiative for the rapprochement.*"¹

On the same day Molotov saw the French and British Ambassadors in Moscow, as well as Mr. Strang, the special representative of the Foreign Office who had just arrived. Urged by Paris to include the Baltic states in its scheme of guarantees, the British Government had at last decided to do so. The interview of 15th June was as fruitless as the succeeding interviews were to be, for what Russia had in mind was a pact of non-aggression with Germany from which she would derive substantial advantages. Thus it was really Germany who, by accepting or refusing this, held the scales in the negotiations undertaken by London and Paris.

Count Ciano's Mission

Germany accepted. The day after Astakhov's talk with Draganov, which was reported to the Wilhelmstrasse immediately, Ribbentrop told M. Shiratori, the Japanese Ambassador in Rome, that "*Germany intended to sign a pact of non-aggression with the U.S.S.R.*"³ A few days later Count Ciano revealed to the Soviet Charge d'Affaires in Rome Germany's first concrete proposals, based on three main points : " (1) *Germany would help*

¹ N.-S.R., p. 31. Ribbentrop later confirmed at Nuremberg that "the first move was made by the Russians." See G. M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1948, p. 103.

² This fact was reported by M. Shiratori himself a little later in a conversation in Rome with von Plessen, who incorporated the gist of it in a note which he sent to Berlin on September 4th, 1939 (not published in N.-S.R.).

to improve relations between Russia and Japan. (2) Germany would sign a non-aggression pact with Russia, which would include a guarantee for the Baltic states. (3) There would be a large-scale commercial agreement." There is proof that these proposals did in fact reach Moscow, since Molotov mentioned them in his talk with von Schulenburg on 15th August.¹

A Halt in the Negotiations

On 15th June Astakhov forwarded to the German leaders the proposal for a non-aggression pact between the two countries. Two days later Hilger, back in Moscow after a trip to Berlin, discussed economic questions with Mikoyan, the Commissar for Foreign Trade, but without any appreciable result, which rather annoyed Hitler.² The Ambassador, von Schulenburg, who was greatly in favour of a *rapprochement* between Germany and Russia, called on Molotov on 25th June and was received " *in a friendly manner.*" He did his best to find out what might be the " political basis " which, as Molotov had asserted more than a month before, would permit such an understanding, but he did not succeed in solving the mystery. Molotov "thawed." a little, however, when suggesting that " *it was both desirable and possible that normal relations should be resumed with Germany*"³

At the end of June, Germany suddenly broke off the negotiations. The Wilhelmstrasse ordered von Schulenburg to discontinue the talks, which had already gone

¹ N.-S.R., p. 54.

² N.-S.R., pp. 25-6.

³ N.-S.R., p. 27.

very far.¹ This interruption, whatever its cause, did not last long as the negotiations on the economic proposals were resumed soon after in Berlin. They were officially announced on 22nd July in a communique from the department of the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Trade.

Hitler Decides to Attack on 26th August

Two events of unequal importance, but both having some bearing on the bargaining which was to follow, occurred at the end of July.

At the end of this month the Army General Staff submitted to Hitler its plans for the Polish campaign. Hitler demanded a few adjustments and soon after fixed 26th August as the date of the attack.² For him the consequences of this decision were similar to those in which Britain and France were involved when they guaranteed Poland, Rumania and Greece. Hitler too had placed himself in a position of inferiority to Stalin. Since he had decided on war and the date of hostilities was settled, he needed Russia's collusion and *he had to get it by a definite date* or the whole of his plans would be jeopardised.

By the end of July he was beginning to be impatient, and Stalin and Molotov had him nicely hooked. Hitler would have to pay the top price for Soviet aid.

The Stakes : Poland and the Baltic

The second event was the decision, announced by Chamberlain in the House of Commons on 31st July,

¹ *N.-S.R.*, pp. 27-8.

² R. Carrier, *Les Secrets de la Guerre dévoilés par Nuremberg*, Paris, Fayard, 1946, pp. 108-9; sec p. 47, note 3.

but reached by the Government a week before, to send a military mission to Moscow. It should not be forgotten that the Moscow negotiations had now reached a deadlock. Each time Molotov's demands were met, he asked for more. They had thus gone from a simple joint declaration to a pact of mutual assistance ; when Britain had agreed to guarantee the Baltic states, Molotov refused to guarantee Switzerland and Holland ; he then asked for a pact of special assistance between Russia, Poland and Turkey ; then raised the question of " indirect aggression " ; and finally, on 20th July, when everything seemed settled, he demanded the immediate opening of military talks before the final conclusion of the political agreement.^x

These ludicrous proceedings, with their endless prevarications, were entirely due to the fact that the agreement with Germany was nearly concluded and all they had to do was to temporise for a few weeks longer.

But by inviting the British and French Governments to send military missions to Moscow, Stalin secured another advantage. It allowed him to exert stronger pressure on the German leaders, or, to put it bluntly, to " blackmail " them the more effectively. Stalin could thus raise the price of his co-operation even higher. On the other hand, he knew he could start military

¹ As early as 8th-9th July Molotov demanded that the military and political agreements should be concluded simultaneously. See M. Jacques Bardoux' report of 1st December, 1939, to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate on the Anglo-French-Russian negotiations, roneoed copy, pp. 11-12. The text of the political agreement which, according to Molotov himself, contained only a few " unimportant differences over details," has been published by M. Georges Bonnet in his book *Fin d'une Europe: De Munich a la guerre*, Geneva, Editions du Cheval Aile, 1948, pp. 401-3.

conversations with the Allies without endangering his policy, which had cut loose from " collective security " and was inspired solely by the interests of the U.S.S.R., as he conceived them. For he knew perfectly well that the Allies could not force Poland's hand and obtain the right of passage for Soviet troops which Voroshilov demanded in the Moscow talks.

In Berlin they were soon fairly reassured about the real nature of the military talks in Moscow, but they would have liked to be completely reassured because of the imminence of the war against Poland.

A Success for Secret Diplomacy

Towards the end of July "secret diplomacy " made a contribution of the first importance. On the evening of the 26th Schnurre invited Astakhov and Barbarin, chief of the Soviet commercial mission, to dinner with him on " neutral " ground in a Berlin hotel. He did this with the entire approval of Ribbentrop, and the conversation was conducted with complete candour, if one can use the word. Astakhov reminded them of "*the close collaboration and community of interests in foreign policy which formerly existed between Germany and Russia*" Schnurre thought it would be possible, by progressive stages, to revive the Treaty of Berlin of 1926, or even to go further, thanks to "*a new arrangement which would take into account the political interests vital to both parties.*" The interests of Germany and Russia, he said, nowhere came into conflict "*in the whole area from the Baltic to the Black Sea*" and on the other hand both countries had in common "*their opposition to the capitalist democracies*" Astakhov agreed : "*the way to an understanding with*

Germany was through that which corresponded with the vital interests of both countries " but a certain lapse of time would be necessary to dissipate the unfortunate consequences of the anti-Comintern Pact and of Munich.

Schnurre was in rather more of a hurry than Astakhov. He thought it was possible to reach a "*far-reaching compromise on their mutual interests* " and to prepare the way for it gradually, but on condition that Moscow would sign nothing beforehand with the Western powers. " *Now was the right moment*" he said, " *but it would not be so after the conclusion of a pact with London*" Moscow had to choose. What, in fact, " *could England offer to Russia ?* " At best "*participation in a European war*" with not a single concrete advantage.¹ While Germany could not only allow Russia to remain neutral, to remain " *outside a possible European conflict*" but also offer her " *if Moscow wished, a German-Russian understanding on mutual interests, an understanding which, as in former times, would work out to the advantage of both countries* "

What Schnurre put forward on Ribbentrop's behalf was what Stalin had been actively and patiently pursuing since 10th March. But Astakhov evaded the questions he was asked about the Anglo-French negotiations, or rather, he answered them by outlining in greater detail than before the conditions on which Russia was prepared to make an agreement. He mentioned the Baltic states, Rumania and Poland. On this last point Astakhov declared " *that Danzig would in one way or another return to the Reich, and the Corridor question would have to be solved somehow in favour of the Reich* " But Germany must give up all her designs on " *the Galician and Ukrainian terri-*

¹The same argument was already contained in Ribbentrop's instructions of 26th May. See p. 13.

tories " of Poland . . . The partition of **Eastern Europe** which was to bring the two partners into **agreement** was thus sketched out.¹

This exchange of ideas and proposals set the diplomats to work. On 29th July Weizsaecker asked Schulenburg to inform the Soviet leaders that, in the Polish question, Germany was prepared " *to safeguard all Soviet interests and to reach an understanding with **the** Moscow Government* " as well as " *to respect the vital Soviet interests in the Baltic* " ² On 2nd August Ribbentrop saw Astakhov himself and told him that there was room for both countries in the Baltic, and that at the first provocation Poland would be annihilated " *in a week* " : Germany was quite ready " *for an agreement with Russia on the fate of this country.* " ³

That was the basis for the pact of 23rd August and for the secret protocol signed on the same day. .The last lap to complete agreement was to be covered in three weeks.

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 32-6.

² N.-S., p. 36.

³ N.-S.R., pp. 37-9.

CHAPTER III

The Agreements of 23rd August, 1939

AT the beginning of August, 1939, the main issue between Berlin and Moscow was no longer the preservation of peace between the two countries but the joint settlement of the status of Eastern Europe.

Molotov had already been informed on 3rd August of Ribbentrop's proposals to Astakhov, and he received confirmation the same day from von Schulenburg, the Ambassador, that Germany was prepared *to recognise Russia's interests in the Baltic and in Poland*. Molotov was anxious to know if the Baltic included Lithuania as well.¹

Hitler was unwilling to give way on Lithuania, and so this country was not included in the Russian sphere of interest in the agreements of 23rd August. But on the whole the talks proceeded smoothly, both in Berlin and Moscow, where Astakhov and von Schulenburg were being briefed by Molotov and Ribbentrop respectively. Certain assurances were exchanged, the Germans declaring that their interests in Poland "*were quite limited*," and the Russians that "*negotiations with England had begun at a time when there had still been no sign of a disposition on the part of Germany to come to an understanding.*"²

¹N.-S.R., pp. 39-41.

² Conversation between Schnurre and Astakhov, 10th August, N.S.R., pp. 44-6.

After this both parties were basically in agreement. According to President Bénéš, a trustworthy and well-informed witness, the Soviet demands were finally accepted by the Nazi leaders on the night of 3rd-4th August. " On July 19th, 1939," he wrote in his memoirs, " General Ingr and Colonel Moravec informed me that, according to reports they had received from Berlin, very far-reaching negotiations were going on between Germany and the U.S.S.R. On August 10th we received some important details through the same channels. *The crucial moment had come and gone. It occurred during the night of the yd-tfk of August.* There was an important meeting at which Ribbentrop, Goering, Goebbels, Kcitel, Jodl and a few others were present. Was the agreement to be signed or not ? Hitler was in Berchtesgaden and had a direct line to the room where they met . . . The discussion went on until daybreak on 4th August, with Hitler constantly on the line. The Fuehrer at last agreed and the special messenger flew to Moscow carrying with him their general decision."¹

A non-aggression pact could have been settled at once. But there was the much more delicate question, already considered in broad outline, of dividing up the spheres of interest. " The partition of Poland had in principle been decided on about 10th August and Germany had given Russia an assurance that she would not interfere with the negotiations which Moscow might see fit to open with the Baltic states and Finland." ² But the undertakings which they had exchanged still had to be worked out in detail and the discussions

¹ Extract published in the *Gazells de Lausanne*, 14th March, 1948.

² Article previously quoted from the *Daily Telegraph*. (See p. 6, note 1).

could not proceed through the normal diplomatic channels, especially as Hitler's war-machine was ready to go into action against Poland and he was in a hurry to get things settled.

A Decisive Day : 12th August, 1939

Worried by rumours that an attack on Poland was imminent, Giano arrived at Salzburg on nth August. At their first meeting Ribbentrop gave him to understand that Germany would turn down any compromise, and that she wanted war. " The decision to fight is implacable," he wrote in his diary the same day.¹ The Italian Foreign Minister was completely panic-stricken at the German decision. When they had signed the " Pact of Steel " a few months previously both Italy and Germany had agreed not to embark on any new adventures *for at least three years*. Italy was not in a fit state to join in a war which risked becoming world-wide. Ciano raised a number of objections and suggested issuing a joint communique which would leave the door open for negotiations. To this Ribbentrop turned a deaf ear, although he did his best to reassure his colleague. There was really nothing to fear, for Britain and France would not become involved. The conflict would not spread, but even if it did victory was certain since they could count on Russia's neutrality : " *Russia*

¹ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P- 124. In the introduction which he wrote a few days before the Verona trial Ciano recalled that on 11th August Ribbentrop informed him of " the German decision to put a match to the powder barrel." When he asked him if Germany wanted Danzig or the Corridor, Ribbentrop replied : " Not that any more. We want war ! " (*Diary*, pp. 557-3.) Cf. also *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 299.

*will not come in as the Moscow talks have completely broken down."*¹ Also " *talks of a very definite character are proceeding between Moscow and Berlin* " *

Next day Ciano went up with Ribbentrop to Obersalzberg, where Hitler was expecting him. The Italian Foreign Minister insisted that Italy, in her present state, was unprepared militarily and dangerously exposed. He suggested an international conference which Mussolini would again be willing to summon. But now Hitler was going off on quite a different course. Another Munich was out of the question as this time Germany risked not getting everything she wanted. Right up to the eve of the attack on Poland Hitler had only one fear : " that some swine (*Schweinhund*) would offer to mediate."³ They also explained to Ciano that Poland and Russia would have to be invited to the conference : " *The Fuehrer declared that Russia could no longer be kept out of meetings between the Powers in future. During the talks between Russia and Germany the Russians brought up Munich and various other occasions when they had been left out in the cold and made it clear that they would not put up with this in future.**" Besides, Italy had nothing to fear, for the conflict would be localised : " Hitler was *firmly convinced* that the Western democracies would in the end

¹ The reference here is, of course, to the conversations between Russia and the Western Democracies. The British and French military missions reached Moscow on the morning of the same day, 11th August.

² *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 298.

³ In his report to the military chiefs on 22nd August, 1949. See the judgement in the Nuremberg trial: *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. I, p. 201 ; cf. N.C.A., III, p. 585.

⁴ Except when otherwise stated, the passages quoted from this conversation are taken from the memorandum of Paul Schmidt, the interpreter, dated 12th August (unpublished).

flinch when faced with the outbreak of a general war."¹

Hitler was not, as a matter of fact, quite so sure as all that. If he assumed an air of "complete confidence" it was with the idea of bolstering up Ciano's morale, which was considerably shaken when he found himself faced with a decision he did not expect. Allowance should be made for the fact that Hitler made use of bluff, even with his Axis partners, whether they were "senior" or "junior." This was a usual feature of his tactics in the "war of nerves," which he inflicted on his allies just as much as on his enemies. For some months, and by 23rd May, 1939, at the latest, he had borne in mind the possibility that this time Britain and France would not back out, but he had decided on war nevertheless.² His military plans were in fact dictated by this possibility. Poland had to be crushed quickly before the Western powers had time to intervene, and the Rhine fortifications and the *Blitzkrieg* in the East made this possible.

For the *Blitzkrieg* to have the success he reckoned on, it was important that Poland should be isolated from the West as well as from the East. In the West the new fortifications went right up to the Dutch frontier, thus barring the classical invasion routes. A direct attack could be made only through Holland, whose neutrality

¹ According to Ciano, Hitler ended the interview by reaffirming "his determination to act quickly against Poland and his complete certainty that the conflict would be localised, so that Italy would not find herself involved for any reason." *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, P. 303.

² See *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. 1, pp. 38-9; cf. N.C.A., VII, p. 849, *et seq.* According to Goering's evidence, Hitler had decided as early as April, 1939, to adopt military measures if other methods failed. See D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, pp. 7-8 of the off-print of the article.

the Western powers would not violate.¹ All that remained therefore was to isolate Poland from Russia, and that had already been done. Hitler even went to the trouble of explaining to Ciano that "*Russia would never come in on the side of Poland, for she cordially hated her*"; that "*the only reason for sending an Anglo-French military mission to Moscow was to cover up the complete breakdown of the political negotiations*"; and that Russia's aim was "*to widen her outlet to the Baltic, and she was not in the mood to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the Western powers*"

At the precise moment when Hitler was beginning to paint such a reassuring picture, two telegrams were brought in, one from Moscow, the other from Tokio. "The conversation was interrupted for a moment," noted Paul Schmidt, "and the contents of the Moscow telegram were immediately given to Count Ciano. *The Russians said they agreed that a German political negotiator should be sent to Moscow*"² After Hitler had commented

¹ These views of Hitler's on Allied tactics correspond closely to the military concepts favoured by the French High Command, as is shown in Gamch'n's memoirs (*Servir*, Paris, Plon, 3 vols.).

² The fact that this telegram has not been discovered among the correspondence between von Schulenburg and the Wilhelmstrasse does not invalidate Schmidt's account, if one bears in mind the large number of contacts retained between Berlin and Moscow up to the last minute. But the possibility that it might simply have been a manoeuvre to bolster up Ciano's morale cannot be ruled out. In Ciano's notes on this meeting Hitler is reported to have said: "The Russians will not make any move. The Moscow negotiations have been a complete failure. The Anglo-French military missions were sent to Moscow only to cover up the **great** political failure. On the other hand, Russo-German contacts are proceeding very favourably, and in the last few days there **has been** a Russian request for the dispatch of a German plenipotentiary to Moscow to negotiate the friendship pact." *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 302. Note that in Schmidt's account the initiative for sending an envoy is ascribed to the **Germans** and not to **the Russians**.

on this, Ribbentrop added that " *the Russians had been kept fully informed of Germany's intentions with regard to Poland. He himself had informed the Soviet Char'ge d'Affaires, on the Fuehrer's orders*"

The same day, on 12th August, the first meeting took place in Moscow between the British and French military delegations and the Soviet army chiefs. The die had therefore been cast when these talks began. The question of a *political* understanding between Russia and Germany was in fact already settled. It was now a matter of threshing out the much more urgent problem of how the territory was to be divided up,¹ and that was the object of the German envoy's journey which had just been arranged.

If Lord Halifax had gone to Moscow

This envoy was to be Ribbentrop in person. There has been a great deal of discussion of this event, and London and Paris have been blamed for not sending their leading political figures to Moscow. As early as 15th May, however, Chamberlain in his speech to the House of Commons had anticipated a meeting between his Foreign Minister, Lord Halifax, and the Soviet Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Potemkin, which was due to take place at the assembly of the Council of the League of Nations in Geneva. The opening of the Geneva session had even been postponed for a few days so that M. Potemkin, then on a tour of the Balkans, could be present. Potemkin had returned

¹ This partition was already roughly defined at the beginning of August, that is to say, before the arrival of the Western military missions in Moscow (see p. 27).

to Moscow on 11th May, but the Soviet Government took good care not to send him to Geneva, his place being filled by Maisky, the ambassador in London. Another opportunity arose when the British Government invited Voroshilov, People's Commissar for War, to attend the British army manoeuvres on 3rd June, 1939, but the Soviet marshal declined the invitation.

Even if Lord Halifax had gone to Moscow instead of Mr. William Strang, the situation could only have been changed if the British Foreign Minister had been able to offer Stalin a free hand in the Baltic states and Bessarabia, and a slice of Poland—all without the risk of war. As such a proposal could not possibly have come from London and Paris, whoever was sent to negotiate, the agreement between Germany and Russia was certain to go through from the very fact that the policies of Hitler and Stalin had the same ends in view. These ends would have had to be changed, and no one had the power to change them but Hitler and Stalin themselves.

The Agreements of "The Eve"

On 14th August Molotov sent fresh instructions to Astakhov which showed that in Moscow the choice had been made.¹ During the three-power military talks on the same day, Marshal Voroshilov raised the question of the passage of Soviet troops across Poland and Rumania and of the occupation of ports and bases in the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic.

Next day, on 15th August, Molotov received through von Schulenburg Ribbentrop's suggestion that he

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 48-9.

should himself go to Moscow to complete the work which had started so well.¹ Molotov replied that " *the Soviet Government warmly welcomed German intentions of improving relations with the Soviet Union*" and that " *he now believed in the sincerity of these intentions*"² But as the Soviet chiefs knew exactly where Germany stood there was no longer any need for them to hurry. Molotov agreed to Ribbentrop's visit, but the preparatory work for it would have to be " *very detailed*" The Soviet Government was henceforth " *convinced that the German Government was really in earnest in its intentions to bring about a change in its relations with the Soviet Union*" but he wanted to know if the proposals sent on from Ciano in June were still valid. He put the following very pertinent question : " *Was the German Government still ready to conclude a non-aggression pact or something similar with the Soviet Union ?* " If so, they must begin " *concrete discussions of these questions.*"*

On the 16th Ribbentrop hastened to accept all Molotov's requests : " *the points brought up by M. Molotov are in accordance with German desires ; Germany is ready to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and, if the Soviet Government so desires, one which would be irrevocable for a term of 25 years*" He confirmed the June proposals. But the situation was such that war with Poland might break out any day and the most urgent questions between the two countries had therefore to be settled quickly. Ribbentrop was ready to go to Moscow on 18th August, armed with full powers of negotiation from the Fuehrer.⁴

¹ M.-S.R., pp. 51-2.

² M.-S.R., p. 52.

³ M.-S.R., pp. 53-6.

⁴ M.-S.R., p. 58.

When von Schulenburg called at the Kremlin on 17th* August to read Ribbentrop's reply to Molotov, Molotov was able to hand him a note from his government summarising its position. The Soviet Government had considered joining in the organisation of a defensive front against Germany only because it believed it was threatened by her. If Germany's policy was undergoing a change "*the Soviet Government could look upon such a change only with pleasure*" and for its part was quite prepared to alter its own policy. The preliminary conditions for the establishment of these new relations now existed. They could begin with the trade agreement, then go on to the second stage, which "*could be the conclusion of a non-aggression pact . . . with the simultaneous conclusion of a special protocol which would define the interests of the signatory parties in this or that question of foreign policy and which would form an integral part of the pact.*"¹

The Soviet Government had, therefore, decided that the moment had come to show its hand. It began by considering a simple *rapprochement*, then demanded a non-aggression pact, and finally produced the "special protocol" in which the real ground for discussion with Germany was specified: a definition of the political and territorial interests of the two countries in Eastern Europe.

On the same day, 17th August, Voroshilov asked for, or rather insisted on, the postponement of the work of the military committee until 21st August. The Soviet chiefs were to use these few days to bring to final completion the operation they had been **planning since** the previous March.

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 59-60.

Hitler cries: "I Have the World in my Pocket! "

Von Ribbentrop was feverishly busy—they had to hurry as "*hostilities might break out any day.*" Von Schulenburg was told to insist to Molotov on a quick settlement of the agreement, which Hitler said would be impossible if they kept to the usual diplomatic methods. The break with Poland was "probable," even "inevitable," and Russia's interests would therefore have to be taken into consideration beforehand. Ribbentrop was ready to leave for Moscow at once so as to discuss these points orally. The Reich Embassy was instructed to point out to the Kremlin that German foreign policy had reached a historic turning-point : the journey of its minister must therefore "take place immediately."¹

During the night of 19th-20th August the trade treaty was signed in Berlin. This meant that, in its essentials, the political agreement had been secured. On 19th August Molotov had handed Schulenburg a draft of the non-aggression pact, but when the Russians suggested signing it in a week's time Hitler, with 26th August fixed as the date of the attack on Poland,² grew impatient and on 20th August sent a personal message to Stalin asking him to see Ribbentrop on the 22nd or at the latest on the 23rd. He accepted the text of the pact

¹ Telegram of 18th August to von Schulenburg. N.-S.R., pp. 61-3.

² On 25th August Hitler decided to postpone D-day until 1st September. He needed these few days for a last attempt he intended to make to persuade the British Government to allow him a free hand in Poland. See his letter on the morning of the 25th to the British Ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, in the British White Paper, Misc. No. 8 (1939), *Correspondence between His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the German Government, August, 1939*, H.M.S.O., 1939, p. 5.

put forward by Molotov, but as the various points to be incorporated in the secret protocol had still to be defined, the only quick way of settling them was for a " *responsible statesman* " to go and negotiate on the spot, since " *the tension between Germany and Poland had become intolerable* " ¹

Hitler's message reached Stalin on the 21st, and Stalin at once sent his agreement.⁸ The Soviet leaders could hardly conceal their satisfaction from von Schulenburg. For his part Hitler, according to Gocring's evidence,³ was very worried because the answer to his message was slow in coming, but when the good news of the Russians' acceptance reached Berlin he gave way to an hysterical outburst of joy. One of his intimates who was present at the scene relates that Hitler began to hammer on the wall with his fists, uttering inarticulate cries, and finally shouting exultantly " I have the world in my pocket ! " ⁴

An Historic Day : 23rd August

On the evening of 21st August in Berlin, and on the morning of the 22nd in Moscow, a communique whose wording had been suggested by Molotov announced the departure of Ribbentrop from Moscow with a view to signing a pact of non-aggression. The last meeting of the three-power military committee took place in Moscow on the 21st in an atmosphere of farewells. **On the 22nd** Hitler informed his General Staff of the impending offensive against Poland. On the same day Voroshilov

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 66-7.

² N.-S.R., p. 69.

³ See D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, p. 15 of the off-print.

⁴ Interrogation by the American Mission.

had finally consented to see General Doumenc, head of the French military mission, at about 7 p.m. in the evening. He listened to Doumenc's announcement that the French Government agreed to Soviet troops crossing Poland, then replied that this was not sufficient and that he wanted the formal consent of the Polish and Rumanian Governments. If their consent came, they would conclude the pact " *if the political circumstances were still the same.*"¹

When he gave this dilatory answer to General Doumenc, Marshal Voroshilov was well aware that the " political circumstances " were no longer " the same," for the conclusion of the German-Soviet agreement which had been in preparation since March, 1939, was now certain.

Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow at about midday on 23rd August with another message from Hitler stating that henceforth " *all the problems of Eastern Europe were to be handled exclusively by Germany and Russia.*" *

The talks between Stalin, Molotov, Ribbentrop, von Schulenburg and Gustav Hilger began at 3 p.m. Almost at once Stalin broached what for him was the all-important question : Russia must have the Latvian ports of Windau and Libau on the Baltic. Ribbentrop telephoned for Hitler's agreement and for authority to sign the secret protocol defining their respective spheres of influence. Hitler had an atlas quickly brought to him, glanced at the map of the Baltic, and answered, " Yes. Agreed," at about 8 p.m.³

The meeting was resumed shortly afterwards and

¹ Account by General Doumenc in *Carrefour*, 21st May, 1947.

² Telegram of 23rd August, not published in N.-S.R.

³ N.-S.R., pp. 71-2, and American Mission's interrogation.

went on until after midnight. The non-aggression pact and the secret protocol were signed and dated the 23rd. Everybody was jubilant. The camera caught them with their faces split from ear to ear with satisfied smiles. They drank champagne. Stalin proposed a toast in honour of Hitler : "*I know how much the German nation loves its Fuehrer ; I should therefore like to drink to his health.*"¹

The Two Treaties

The non-aggression pact, made public immediately, contained two important clauses. In its fourth article the two contracting parties undertook not to join "*any grouping of powers that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.*" By that Stalin severed any possible connection between Russia and the Anglo-French efforts on behalf of "*collective security*" Moreover the pact was to "*enter into force as soon as it was signed*" without the need to wait for its ratification ; and since the secret protocol was considered to be an "*integral part*" of the pact, it too came into effect at once. The way was thus cleared immediately for Hitler to attack Poland, since the diplomatic spadework for this operation, planned as early as the beginning of April, was then finished. The pact was to last *ten years*, a compromise between the twenty-five years which the Germans had at first asked for and the five years suggested by the Russians.'

A good deal about the secret protocol came out at Nuremberg. The defence for the accused wished to

¹ For these meetings, see Hencke's memorandum, N.-S.R., pp. 72-6.

² N.-S.R., pp. 76-7.

mention it since the fact that Hitler and his associates had attacked, partitioned and occupied Poland was rightly held to be a crime. Legally, the secret protocol proved that this crime had been committed by two powers, Germany and Russia—and Russia's representatives were sitting among the judges. Each time a reference to the protocol was made by the defence or by the witnesses, Rudenko, Chief Prosecutor for the U.S.S.R., rose to protest. In spite of his interruptions, the evidence of Gaus, the Counsellor, Weizsaecker, the Secretary of State, and von Ribbentrop himself was incontrovertible.

Actually, there is no point in discussing this, since the documents discovered, including the text of the protocol, provide all the necessary information. This historical problem has been solved.

The secret protocol was in fact signed during the night of 23rd-24th August ; Ribbentrop made the journey in order to sign it, and the Russians welcomed him to Moscow for the same reason.

Dividing up the Spheres of Interest

The text of this document was already known before it was published by the Americans. It runs as follows:-

Moscow, August 23rd, 1939.

On the occasion of the signature of the Non-aggression Pact between the German Reich and the Union of Socialist Republics the undersigned plenipotentiaries of each of the two parties discussed in strictly confidential conversations the question of the boundary of their respective spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. These conversations led to the following conclusions :

1. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement

in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna area is recognised by each party.

2. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula and San.

The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments.

In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

3. With regard to South-Eastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interests in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterestedness in these areas.

4. This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

For the Government of the German Reich :	Plenipotentiary of the Government of the U.S.S.R.:
V. RIBBENTROP	V. MOLOTOV

This document fixed, in particular, the northern boundary of Lithuania as the frontier between Germany and Russia in the Baltic countries, Lithuania being left in the German sphere for the time being ; the frontier was continued in Poland along a line following the rivers Narew, Vistula and San ; and the question of preserving an independent Polish state was left in the air. Finally, it recognised Russia's interests in Bessarabia.

By this treaty Russia was, until she occupied them, henceforth assured of the control of three Baltic states—Finland, Estonia and Latvia ; of Eastern Poland along a line appreciably to the west of the old " Curzon line " ; and lastly, of Bessarabia. The booty was considerable.

Russia gained slightly through a readjustment in the protocol which she had requested on 25th August: in the north the boundary line was to follow the river Pissa, so that it became " the four-river line." This adjustment was recorded as an additional note and was signed on 28th August.¹

The protocol was to be kept as a jealously guarded secret. In the last clause of the signed text it was stated that " *this protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret*" There exists a curious document about this in the shape of an envelope containing the statements of fourteen officials of the German Embassy at Moscow, dated 27th August, 1939. Each gave his word to preserve the strictest silence, not only about the contents of the protocol, which not more than three or four of them knew, but about the very existence of a " *certain secret protocol*"²

Ribbentrop reached Berlin on the 24th and in the afternoon reported to Hitler, who had come up from Berchtesgaden to see him. The Fuehrer was beaming and heaped fulsome praise on his minister, whom he hailed as " a second Bismarck."³ After that, only the complete

¹ Telegram from von Schulenburg to Berlin, No. 229, 28th August, not published in N.-S.R.

² Sealed envelope in the archives of the German Embassy, Moscow.

³ H. B. Gisevius, *To the Bitter End*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1948, p. 364.

surrender of the Western Powers could have prevented the outbreak of war.

The non-aggression pact was ratified by the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. on the evening of 31st August, after a speech by Molotov acclaiming Stalin's success, which was the triumphant conclusion of the great operation begun on 10th May, 1939. A few hours later the Wehrmacht launched its attack on Poland.

CHAPTER IV

The Polish Campaign

HITLER and the Nazi chiefs all considered that their *Lebensraum* lay in the east. Hitler was also of the opinion, after he wrote *Mein Kampf*, that the decisive victory which alone could ensure access to the eastern plains would have to be in the west.

His first idea was therefore to attack in the west and to settle with Poland and Russia later on, when conditions would be very much more in his favour. The war would in any case have to be fought on a single front, starting in the west.

But at about the end of March or, at the latest, the beginning of April, 1939, Hitler knew Poland would not give in to his demands and that if he attacked her he ran the risk, this time, of war with the Western Powers. After informing his General Staff on 23rd May, 1939, that Poland must be attacked at the first favourable opportunity, he added : " *We cannot expect that the Czech affair will be repeated. It will be war.*"¹ Up to the last minute before the offensive Hitler tried hard to avoid the risk of war with the Western Powers, especially through his offer to co-operate with Britain in imperial affairs ; but he had made up his mind to eliminate

¹ Quoted by Jackson, Chief of the Prosecution Counsel for the United States, in his statement at the Nuremberg trial, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. I I , p. 134 ; and cf. N.C.A. V I I , p. 84.

Poland by armed force. There had been no response, either to his advances or to his threats, and he was prepared to accept the consequences.

In these circumstances, how was he to remain faithful to the concept, so firmly rooted in German military circles, of war on a single front ? The only way was by turning the *Blitzkrieg* on Poland and crushing her before the Anglo-French forces could intervene effectively. This was a technical question to which Hitler and his General Staff already had the key. But it was also necessary to isolate Poland in the east so that she could be knocked out brutally and quickly. This was a political question, and it too was on the way to being solved, for in April, and especially in May, Hitler had first the hope and then the certainty that he would be able to neutralise Russia.

Hitler Plans to Neutralise Russia and to Attack Poland

War with Poland was thus almost inevitable. The documents prove that the two ideas of war and collaboration with the U.S.S.R. originated simultaneously in the spring of 1939, and that the certainty of war increased as this collaboration developed. To speculate on what Hitler would have decided to do if in March Stalin had made a declaration similar to Chamberlain's and had assumed the same obligations is a task which is outside the province of a historian working on documents.

We must confine ourselves to establishing the fact that Hitler regarded the war with Poland and the agreement with Russia as complementary, like two closely-related expressions which cannot be considered apart. Stalin's *volte-face* had, moreover, deprived Britain and France of

all the pressure which they might have brought to bear on Hitler to make him see reason. It is now known why Chamberlain, the cautious man of Munich, hastened to offer Britain's aid to Poland on 31st March. It was because this conservative gentleman, who was honest if not very imaginative, not only sustained a moral shock when the Nazis swept into Prague but, like other members of his cabinet, he could not forget 1914. Rightly or wrongly, he thought that if Britain had then made her own position more clear William II might not have gone to war. In any case, Chamberlain and his friends, backed by the French Government, wished this time to avoid any such "*tragic misunderstandings*." The following passage in the letter which Chamberlain sent to Hitler on 22nd August is very characteristic of this state of mind: "It has been alleged that, if His Majesty's Government had made their position more clear in 1914, the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in that allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstandings."¹ Thus the warnings to Hitler were explicit. But this very forthright statement had no effect because Hitler knew that he had all the same avoided a war on two fronts. He also knew that he could in future count on economic aid from the Soviets which, in the event of a war in the west, would allow him to fight under conditions much more favourable than in 1914 and would place him out of reach of the blockade. Indeed, during his conversation with Sir

¹ Misc. No. 8 (1939), *Correspondence between H.M. Government in the U.K. and the German Government, August, 1939*, doc. No. 1, p. 2, H.M.S.O., London, 1939.

Neville Henderson on 25th August, 1939, he declared that " In contrast to the last war, Germany would no longer have to fight on two fronts. Agreement with Russia was unconditional and signified a change in the foreign policy of the Reich which would last a very long time . . . Apart from this, the agreements reached with Russia would also render Germany secure economically for the longest possible period of war."¹ With M. Coulondre, the French Ambassador, who went to give him the same warnings as his British colleague, Hitler took refuge in the certainty of victory which the Russian agreement gave him. " I have concluded an agreement with Moscow," he told him, " which I venture to say is not theoretical but positive . . . I believe I shall win."²

Stalin Bets on War

The attack on Poland was first fixed for 26th August* but was postponed for a few days. It began on 1st September, in accordance with a strategical plan which Hitler had helped to draw up and which was to be completed earlier, not later, than was called for in the time table.

The attack could not, and in fact did not, come as a

¹ Misc. No. 8 (1939), *Correspondence* etc., doc. No. 3, p. 6.

² *Documents diplomatiques français 1938-9*, p. 259.

³ Goering, in his deposition quoted at Nuremberg by Mr. Griffith-Jones, prosecuting counsel, spoke of 25th August ; the order postponing the operation was said to have been issued on the afternoon of the 24th {*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. I II, p. 247 ; and cf. *N.C.A.*, vol VIII, pp. 534-5). But Goering himself stated that Hitler postponed the invasion " on the day when England officially guaranteed Poland," that is, on 25th August. See also *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. DC, p. 596 ; and General Jodl's deposition, *ibid.*, vol. XV, p. 422.

surprise to Stalin. He knew perfectly well that it had been decided on by Germany, and it was with this knowledge of things to come that he had made the agreement with Berlin. On 12th August, Ribbentrop told Ciano that " the Russians had been kept fully informed of Germany's intentions towards Poland."¹ According to the evidence of the German agents who maintained liaison between Hitler and Stalin, Stalin was quite aware that " *the non-aggression pact would result in war between Germany and Poland, a war which was bound to become general* " ² Moreover the impatience of Hitler and his chiefs during the last stages of the Moscow deal gave away not only what they were after but their actual plans, and Stalin used this knowledge to force his conditions on them. When the two partners signed the secret protocol of 23rd August with a view to " *changing the politico-territorial* " status of the countries in question (the Baltic states and Poland), they knew that this was not just a vague clause held in reserve for some future eventuality but an agreement worked out to settle a definite problem which they would soon have to face. They were in entire agreement on this point. " Russia and Germany," Ribbentrop explained later at Nuremberg, " considered they had a right to recover the territories which they had lost after the last war : that is all." Moreover on 23rd August Ribbentrop had himself informed Molotov of the Reich's intention to attack if their differences with Poland were not smoothed out.³ Henceforth both knew that they would

¹ See p. 32.

² Interrogation by the American Mission.

³ Ribbentrop's deposition at Nuremberg, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. X, p. 268 and cf. vol. X, p. 316.

not be smoothed out, and with the agreements in his pocket Stalin was no longer concerned that they should be, for all his tactics had contributed to prevent a settlement. Goering was not wrong in supposing that by accepting an agreement during the Polish crisis the Russians "aimed at getting Germany more deeply involved in the conflict by leaving her free on that side."¹ If at the last moment the Western Powers had given way and accepted the agreement put forward by Hitler, it could only have been reached through a second Munich in which Russia, who had been kept out of the first, would have had to be present. This being so, Russia as well as Germany would have submitted her claims. In his answer to the British Government on 29th August Hitler expressed himself with brutal frankness : " *The Government of the Reich felt, however, bound to point out to the British Government that in the event of a territorial rearrangement in Poland they would no longer be able to bind themselves to give guarantees or to participate in guarantees without the U.S.S.R. being associated therewith*,"* If, therefore, the Allies had wished to stage another Munich by accepting a "rearrangement" of Polish territory, the new Polish frontier would no more have been guaranteed by this solution than was the new frontier of Czechoslovakia by the agreement of 1938. The Allies were informed by Hitler himself that since 23rd August they had to reckon on having to meet the Soviet's claims as well as Germany's.

After 23rd August the German and Soviet Governments had no need for new agreements. Once war had

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc.*, vol. I X, p. 345.

² Misc. No. 8 (1939) *Correspondence between H.M. Government in the U.K. and the German Government, August, 1939*, doc. No. 5, p. 12.

broken out they both relied on the secret protocol *of* the 23rd and regarded it as applying perfectly to the specific case of the partition of Poland after a victorious armed conflict.

Ribbentrop Asks the Soviet to Intervene

In the documents which have been examined there is no trace of a military plan drawn up jointly by both governments for the war with Poland. The idea of military collaboration must, however, have been considered, since on 27th August, after rumours that the Soviet troops had crossed the Polish frontier, von Schulenburg was instructed, in the event of the rumours being confirmed, to request the Moscow Government to withdraw its troops as the diplomatic preparations for the war had not yet been completed.¹ But on 3rd September, 1939—the day on which France and Britain declared war on Germany—Ribbentrop invited the Soviet Government *to move its troops into Poland in order to occupy the territory allotted to it in the secret protocol of 23rd August.*²

The documents provide evidence which allows one point of historical interest to be cleared up beyond all shadow of doubt. In their propaganda the Communist parties have done their best to justify the entry of the Soviet troops into Poland, their main argument being that the occupation of Eastern Poland was necessary to forestall the Germans and to defend the U.S.S.R. against a possible German attack immediately afterwards from territory near the Soviet frontier.

¹ Telegram from Berlin, No. 218, 27th August, not published in *N.-S.R.*

² *N.-S.R.*, p.86.

The truth was quite the reverse. The Soviet Government wanted to let the Wehrmacht first crush the Polish army, even if, as Ribbentrop had foreseen on 3rd September, this involved the entry of German forces into the area beyond the "four rivers" in the territory reserved for Russia under the secret protocol.

On the 4th September Molotov replied that the Soviet Government agreed it would have to intervene at a suitable time in Poland but that it was still too early. He went on to say that if during the military operations the German-Russian line of demarcation was crossed, this was not important as the partition arranged on 23rd August could not be changed.¹

The Kremlin in Quest of a Political Justification

Ribbentrop renewed his invitation on 9th September. On that date Molotov gave an undertaking that the Russians would intervene "in a few days,"² but went back on his promise the following day with a statement that, although they were ready for the military side of the operation, a *political justification* still had to be found. As von Schulenburg was insisting on the "vital" need for immediate action by the Red Army, Molotov explained to him that "the Soviet Government had intended to take the occasion of the further advance of German troops to declare that Poland was falling apart and that it was necessary for the Soviet Union, in consequence, to come to the aid of the Ukrainians and the White Russians 'threatened' by Germany. This argument was to make the intervention of the

¹ N.-S.R., p. 87.

² N.-S.R., pp. 89-90.

*Soviet plausible to the masses and at the same time avoid gyrations in the Soviet Union the appearance of an aggressor."*¹

Today, the underlying cause for Molotov's anxiety can be correctly explained. Through the protocol of the 23rd Russia acquired some very important territorial gains without having to join in the war. Stalin was therefore under no compulsion to pay for his share of the spoils by giving military support. He was, moreover, convinced that the Wehrmacht would win the battle on its own, and this gave him considerable freedom of action. If he had come in immediately, as Ribbentrop had asked him to do, his intervention would have seemed too obvious a break with the policy of "neutrality" which he had ostensibly adopted. Stalin's neutrality was invented and practised in such a way as to combine the advantages of peace with those of war, and he would have sacrificed it only if absolutely forced to do so.

On the other hand, in spite of his contempt for public opinion in his own and other countries, he was not unaware of its importance and was anxious not to aggravate the feelings of indignation which his "treason" of 23rd August had aroused on all sides. He had therefore built up his tactics like a precision instrument so that his intervention in Poland would come at exactly the moment when it no longer had an openly "military" character.

State of Alarm in Moscow

But on 9th September a grain of sand got into the machinery and came near to throwing everything out

¹ Telegram from von Schulenburg, 10th September, N.-S.R., p. 91.

of gear. This was the D.N.B. communique announcing that military operations in Poland **were almost over** and that an armistice might be signed at any minute. The communique described what was in fact the **true** situation, but it is quite possible that the German authorities put it out with the intention of forcing Russia's hand.

This caused a great commotion in Moscow, where they had expected the war to last a few weeks longer at least. On 10th September Molotov had already told von Schulenburg that the Soviet Government had been taken completely by surprise at the unexpected speed of the German military successes. "The Red Army," he said, "had counted on several weeks, which have now shrunk to a few days . . ." ¹ And scarcely ten days after operations had begun, the end was already in sight ! If the Poles asked for an armistice before the Soviet troops entered their country, Stalin risked not being on the spot at the right moment, and although he was guaranteed by the secret protocol, he would find it more difficult to change the line of demarcation into a line of partition. And if the Soviets intervened after an armistice concluded by a Polish Government which **was** still in being, their action would take on an openly aggressive character before the whole world.

They had to move, therefore, before the armistice was signed. Von Schulenburg reassured the Russian **leaders** on this point on 12th September, when he told them that there was as yet no question of an armistice. ² But as **the** military situation was changing rapidly, the problem

¹ *N.-S.R.*, p. 91.

² Telegram from von Schulenburg to Berlin, No. 334, 12th September, not published in *N.-S.R.*

remained the same. The Russians were anxious to start neither too early nor too late. To hit on the moment best suited to their own interests they needed information about what was happening to the Polish Army, the state it was in, and its movements. They went to the Germans for it, and General Jodl, after consulting Hitler, ordered the High Command to supply them with all the military information they required.¹

On 14th September Molotov explained to von Schulenburg that "*in order to justify the Soviet's action politically it was of the greatest importance*" for his Government "*not to take action until the governmental centre of Poland, the city of Warsaw, had fallen*"—clearly for the same reasons as would force it to intervene before an armistice. He accordingly asked "*to be informed as nearly as possible when they could count on the capture of Warsaw*" by the Wehrmacht². During the same conversation Molotov assured the German Ambassador that the Red Army had completed its preparations earlier than was expected and was therefore ready to go into action. Ribbentrop was delighted,³ and Goering was able to announce to Count Magistrati, a high official in the Italian Embassy in Berlin, that as this was the case Russia could "absorb a part of Poland."⁴

Ribbentrop answered Molotov's request for information in a special message on 15th September which stated that "*The Polish Army will soon be destroyed and Warsaw will be occupied in a few days*" At the same time

¹ Note No. 30 in the telegram from Moscow, not published in N.-S.R. See the assurances given by Ribbentrop on 13th September, N.-S.R., p. 92.

² N.-S.R., pp. 92-3.

³ N.-S.R., p. 93.

⁴ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P. 152.

he confirmed that everything would be done within the framework of the secret protocol and asked for the date of the Soviet Army's advance.¹

Ribbentrop's news about Warsaw was premature, although based on accurate information from the German High Command. This was the second miscalculation it had made, for it had already given out that Warsaw had fallen as early as 9th September. Molotov had then rushed to the telephone to exchange congratulations with von Schulenburg. "I have received your communication," he told him, "regarding the entry of the German troops into Warsaw. *Please convey my congratulations and my greetings to the German Rtkh Government.*"² The truth was that the heroic city held out until the 27th, but its resistance could not change the course of events. The false report of its impending fall, however, spurred the Soviet Government into action and induced it to put its invasion plans into operation without delay.

The Quarrel over the Joint Communiqué

Between 16th and 17th September, the date of the Soviet advance fixed on the basis of military information supplied by Ribbentrop, a discussion arose between the two Governments concerning a joint communiqué announcing the entry of the Soviet Army into Poland.

It is worth digressing for a moment, for this dispute is not without interest. Molotov had hinted to von Schulenburg on 10th September that to provide a political justification for her intervention Russia was

¹ N.S.R., pp. 93-4.

² N.-S.R., p. 89.

obliged to allege that she had *to go to the aid of the Ukrainians and White Russians threatened by the German advance*. Even von Schulenburg, a most accommodating man, thought that this was going too far. He remarked that *Germany could not possibly accept such a justification*, since Moscow knew perfectly well that no threat of this kind existed.¹ Ribbentrop again took up this point in a personal message to Molotov on 15th September, when he observed that the argument which the Soviet Government wished to use ran counter to both the treaty of non-aggression and the secret protocol signed by both countries. In the same message he submitted the text of a communiqué which might satisfy both parties.¹ On 16th September Molotov acknowledged that the line he had proposed taking was not very friendly towards Germany and apologised, but gave as his excuse the fact that *he could see no other way of justifying the action they had in mind*.⁸

If the Germans wanted Russia to act—and obviously they did, so as to commit her more thoroughly to the new policy arising out of the pacts of 23rd August—they would have to put up with a gross distortion of the truth, and a slight tweak to their own prestige.

The quarrel over the communiqué was settled only on 18th September. On the previous day, in the afternoon, the German Foreign Office had telephoned a new draft⁴ which was handed over to Molotov by Schulenburg at 11.30 p.m. Stalin came into Molotov's office **shortly** after the German Ambassador arrived and **rejected it** because in his opinion " *it presented the facts all too frankly*."

¹ N.-S.R., p. 91.

² N.-S.R., p. 94.

³ N.-S.R., p. 95.

³ N.-S.R., p. 100.

He thereupon wrote out in his own hand the version which was accepted by the Wilhelmstrasse next day and issued in both capitals.¹ If the "liberation" of their brother Ukrainians and White Russians was not mentioned in the communique, the Soviet Government made great play with it in its propaganda—discreedily at home, but more freely abroad—through the various Communist parties.

Stalin's Note to M. Grzybowski

At 2 a.m. on 17th September Stalin received von Schulenburg in the presence of Molotov and Voroshilov and announced that the Soviet Army would cross the frontier that morning at 6 a.m. He also read Schulenburg the note which was about to be handed to the Polish Ambassador, and accepted a few alterations which the Reich Ambassador asked him to make.'

The Polish Ambassador in Moscow, M. Grzybowski, is known to have rejected this note in the name of his Government. M. Grzybowski was expecting this communication. When Marshal Voroshilov was interviewed by *hvestia* after the departure of the French and British military missions he had declared, so as to give some semblance of reality to the Russian pose of "neutrality," that Russia was willing to provide Poland with raw materials and armaments. And, to cover up their tracks still more, as late as *2nd September* the Soviet Ambassador in Warsaw had suggested that the two Governments should begin negotiations. But when M. Grzybowski went, *on 8th September*, to the Soviet

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 99-100.

² N.-S.R., p. 96.

Government with the request that it should implement Voroshilov's promise, Molotov himself replied that the situation had changed ; the U.S.S.R. had first of all to safeguard her own interests, and would not only refuse to increase the supplies called for by previous agreements but would even forbid the transit over Russian territory of war material which might come from Poland's allies.¹

The whole drift and tone of this conversation of 8th September gave the Polish Ambassador the feeling that there would be a sudden change in the policy of the U.S.S.R. in the very near future, and at the expense of his country. After 14th September, the day on which Molotov had definitely undertaken to bring in the Soviet troops, the Russian Press began to mention incidents on the Polish-Russian frontier. " *How unimaginative people are* " Ciano noted in his diary apropos of this, " *when they intend to quarrel.* " ² This did not prevent him from doing the same thing himself when, little more than a year later, he had to find some excuse for Italy's onslaught on Greece.

German-Soviet Military Collaboration

During this period Germany and Russia worked together in complete harmony. Berlin was delighted with the Soviet intervention ; one of the military chiefs considered it an event of the highest importance, with " *particularly favourable* " consequences for Germany. ³

¹ *Livre Blanc Polonais*, Paris, 1940, Nos. 171, 172 and 184.

² *Ciano's Diary*, 1939-43, P. 152.

³ N.C.A., VI. p. 978.

Au occasional squall blew up, but it soon died down again, like the "map incident." Colonel, afterwards General, Warlimont, one of the most active members of Hitler's military circle, showed a map to the Soviet Military Attaché at German Headquarters in which the town of Lwov and the Drohobycz oilfields appeared in the German zone of occupation. The Russian Attaché informed Moscow, and Stalin became annoyed¹; however, everything was smoothed over by definite assurances from General Koestring, the German Military Attaché in Moscow, and from Ribbentrop himself. But the High Command received a severe reprimand from Ribbentrop for this incident.

The Soviet troops met only scattered resistance when they entered Poland. The fate of the Polish Army was settled. Its resistance was shortened by the Soviet intervention, whatever else might have happened; but, more important, it was prevented from carrying on the fight in the eastern marches and from withdrawing part of its strength towards the south and continuing the struggle on other fronts. The concerted movements of the German and Russian armies rapidly effected its complete encirclement. The Red Army's tactics were especially designed to "make the formation of a Polish Army abroad impossible," and thus involved "the loss of at least 200,000 to 300,000 soldiers who later would have been of great service in the West."²

The total Soviet losses were 737 killed and 1,862 wounded—enough for Molotov to be able to praise the importance of Russia's military contribution in his

¹ Shulenburg's telegram of 19th September, No. 394, not published in *N.-S.R.*

² Lieut.-General Anders, *An Army in Exile*, London, Macmillan, 1949, p. 11.

speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31st October.¹ And enough for Stalin, a few weeks later in December, publicly to salute German-Soviet friendship as being "sealed in blood."²

An agreement for the military occupation of the conquered territories was concluded by General Koestring and Voroshilov on 22nd September and was carried out on the spot by a joint military commission stationed at Bialystock. The Soviet troops were to advance to the four-river line, as fixed in the secret protocol of 23rd August, and the German troops who had crossed this line in pursuit of the Polish Army were to fall back to the West. These troop movements occupied the last few days of the "Polish campaign," after which the line dividing the German and Soviet zones of influence became a military frontier pending the political settlement ; and on this the documents found in Germany throw a good deal of light.

¹ *Bulletin periodique de la presse russe*, No. 290, p. 20 (Foreign Office, Paris).

² In his reply to Ribbentrop's telegram congratulating him on his 60th birthday.

CHAPTER V

Ribbentrop's second Moscow journey and the fourth partition of Poland

WITH the signing of the pacts of 23rd August, the two contracting parties had fixed the line of demarcation between their spheres of interest in Poland, but there had been no final decision on the future status of the country. In the secret protocol they reserved the right to resolve " *by means of a friendly agreement*" the question of " *maintaining an independent Polish state* " and of settling its future boundary.

The Germans were inclined to favour the creation of a small Polish state which would be a kind of new version of the " Poland of the Congress." Von Moltke, who before the war had been German Ambassador in Warsaw,¹ was still of this opinion on 25th September, as was Mussolini at the beginning of January, 1940. In a letter he wrote to Hitler on 4th January, Mussolini expressed his conviction that " *the creation of a small, disarmed and exclusively Polish Poland . . . could not constitute a threat to the Greater Reich.* " He added that if this were done " *on Germany's initiative, it would be away out of the war and would establish a sufficiently strong basis for peace* "

When he made this suggestion to Hitler, Mussolini did not know that Hitler was no longer in a position to

¹ Memorandum by von Moltke, Berlin, 25th September; not published in N.-S.R.

² *Lettres secretes Hitler-Mussolini*, Paris, Editions du Pavois, 1946, pp. 52-3.

carry it out. Poland's fate had been decided along quite different lines six weeks before in Moscow.

Ribbentrop Has His Eye on Polish Oil: As Have the Russians

The secret protocol of 23rd August had stood up to the test of the Polish campaign very well. While the West, blinded by animosity or by hope, waited to see what would happen when the German and Soviet troops met face to face in eastern Poland, the Red Army finished taking over from the Wehrmacht without incident.

The question of deciding the political future of the conquered territory then arose. During the fighting Ribbentrop had tried to have the demarcation line in the region of the upper San, the farthest south of the "four rivers," moved in Germany's favour, and on 20th September had given General Koestring instructions to this effect by telephone,¹ Germany would have liked to keep just that oil-bearing district of Borislaw-Drohobycz which the German troops had occupied on 17th September, the day on which Soviet troops entered Poland. But Germany's request was rejected by Molotov during his interview with von Schulenburg on 20th September. Schulenburg then suggested that this district in which Ribbentrop took such an interest should be left provisionally under German control within the *military* demarcation line and that the decision on the final *political* frontier should be postponed. This temporary solution was turned down by Molotov, who said that the military frontier should coincide in future with the political frontier, which in the **upper San**

¹ Telephone message from Ribbentrop to Koestring, **not** published in N.-S.R.

should be kept strictly to the line agreed in the secret protocol of 23rd August. To gild the pill a little, Molotov stated that the Soviet Government was prepared to give Germany the Suwalki triangle between East Prussia and Lithuania, except for Augustovo.¹ The question of the upper San was to be raised again by Ribbentrop during his second Moscow visit. At first there was a certain amount of haggling over Suwalki, but the matter was provisionally settled through an exchange of secret letters on 8th October, 1939.²

Stalin Against an Independent Poland

All these were trifling matters compared with the question which the Soviet leaders had raised the previous day.

On 19th September, 1939, Molotov summoned von Schulenburg and informed him of the Soviet Government's intention to negotiate a final settlement of the status of Poland with the German Government. " *The original inclination* " he declared, " *entertained by the Soviet Government and Stalin personally to permit the existence of a residual Poland had given way to the inclination to partition Poland along the Pissa-Narew-Vistula-San line*"³ the four-river line agreed on 23rd August.

This was the first move in a manoeuvre which Stalin was to bring to a masterly conclusion on 27th and 28th September. Its success depended on the abandonment

¹ Telegram from von Schulenburg to Berlin, No. 402, 20th September, not published in *N.-S.R.*

² A copy of these letters appears in the *Tagebuch* of the German Ambassador at Moscow, dated 27th June, 1940. Not published in *N.-S.R.*

* Telegram from von Schulenburg to Berlin on the morning of 20th September, *N.-S.R.*, p. 101.

of any idea of setting up a new "Congress **Poknd.**"

If such a solution had been accepted, both Russia and Germany would have had to part with some of **the** territory they had occupied west and east of the line of demarcation in order to form a new Polish state, however reduced. This idea was certainly distasteful to Stalin, who was temperamentally incapable of making a concession without getting something for it in return. And, more important, it would have spoilt the plan he intended to spring on Ribbentrop. The U.S.S.R. had nothing to gain by surrendering territory to the new Polish state because, as things were at the time, she did not want a new Polish state at all. Stalin might have agreed to give up some of his Polish territory, but only if he could have used it as a bargaining counter to be bought back by Germany at the highest price he could get.

Stalin Exchanges a Strip of Poland for Lithuania

On 22nd September Ribbentrop agreed to go to Moscow to discuss the Polish question, after trying in vain to persuade Molotov to come to Berlin.¹ The visit was arranged for 27th September.

But the bombshell on which Stalin was counting to blow a "Little Poland" sky high and give him Lithuania as well went off two days before Ribbentrop's departure. At 8 p.m. on 25th September Stalin summoned von Schulenburg and, according to the report sent by the German Ambassador to Berlin the same evening, **made** the following remarks, in the presence of **Molotov**:
*"Stalin stated the following : In the final settlement of **the***

¹ N.-S.R., p. 102.

*Polish question anything that in the future might create friction between Germany and the Spviet Union must be avoided. From this point of view, he considered it wrong to leave an independent Polish rump state. He proposed the following : From the territory to the east of the demarcation line, all the province of Lublin and that portion of the province of Warsaw which extends to the Bug should be added to Germanys share. In return, Germany would waive her claim to Lithuania. Stalin offered this suggestion as a subject for the forthcoming negotiations with the Reich Foreign Minister and added that, if Germany consented, the Soviet Union would immediately take up the solution of the problem of the Baltic countries in accordance with the Protocol of 23rd August, and expected in this matter the unstinting support of the German Government. Stalin expressly indicated Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but did not mention Finland."*¹

Stalin was in fact proposing to exchange a strip of Poland, whose status was as yet undefined and which did not belong to him, for Lithuania. If Germany agreed, Lithuania would soon become Soviet territory. The U.S.S.R. would thereby gain control of the three Baltic states and Stalin would rid himself of some exclusively Polish provinces while at the same time making Germany pay a very high price for them—provinces which would have been difficult to assimilate and might have given rise to nationalist claims against Russia. It was better to hand over these provinces to Germany and acquire from this " transfer " the enormous advantage of a radical settlement of the Baltic problem on lines desired by Russian policy ever since the time of Peter the Great.

How could a few million Poles handed over to the

¹ *N.-S.R.*, pp. 102-3.

German executioners tip Stalin's scales against such a resounding success as this ?

Ribbentrop's Visit to Moscow and the Talks

Ribbentrop had not even two days in which to prepare himself for a discussion of the Soviet proposals of the 25th. A note written by Weizsaecker, the Secretary of State, on the coming Moscow negotiations claimed for Germany, "*in the event of the Russians being opposed to an independent Poland, the right to dispose of Polish territory as she pleased, including territory on both sides of the line of demarcation*"¹ Until then Hitler had merely declared, in his Danzig speech of 19th September, that "*the Poland created by the Treaty of Versailles would never be restored*" It was no doubt with his consent that the Reich Foreign Minister left for Moscow armed with full powers and with the task of reaching a decision on the spot from information supplied in his talks with the Soviet leaders.

On his arrival in Moscow with a large number of advisers at about 5.30 p.m. on 27th September (when the plane put in at Koenigsberg they also picked up Forster, the Gauleiter of Danzig), Ribbentrop was this time given a much more spectacular reception. A cohort of high officials, representatives of the Red Army, and a guard of honour were waiting for him in the station, which was all decorated with flags bearing the emblems of the two regimes—the hammer and sickle and the swastika.

Ribbentrop and his suite **stayed at what was formerly the Austrian Embassy, where the members of the**

¹ Not published in N.-S.R.

British military mission had been their neighbours during their previous visit to Moscow on 23rd August.

The first meeting began after 9 p.m. and lasted until about 1 a.m. Stalin again explained his proposals of 25th September : they could, of course, keep to the demarcation line laid down in the secret protocol of 23rd August, but he thought that this would involve them in a number of serious difficulties. The creation of even a small independent Polish state meant that it would be the centre of a tug-of-war between East and West, and might cause permanent friction between the two Governments. By handing over Lithuania to Russia, Germany would get the exclusively Polish provinces east of the Vistula and the Suwalki district in Lithuania as well.¹

Ribbentrop Weighs up the Pros and Cons

Stalin had everything to gain from this offer, made on 25th September and renewed on the 27th.

For his part, Ribbentrop spent several hours in weighing up the pros and cons in so far as they affected German interests. He informed Hitler of his deliberations in a coded telegram sent during the night.¹ The fact that Germany would retain Lithuania was an argument in favour of keeping to the line agreed on 23rd August ; and the four-river boundary formed **the** shortest military frontier between the two countries. But there were other reasons for accepting Stalin's

¹ The details of these conversations are taken from the notes written by Hencke, Under Secretary of State, in September, 1939. Not published in *N.-S.R.*

² It was put into cipher by Hencke himself. Not published in *N.-S.R.*

proposals. Under the conditions laid down on 23rd August, the partition of Poland could, in fact, cause friction between Germany and the U.S.S.R. If Russia were to annex the other Baltic states, Germany would have to take Lithuania under her protection, perhaps at an inconvenient time. The area west of the Vistula which Stalin was offering was richer than that in the east. What eventually attracted Ribbentrop was the idea that Germany could settle the Polish question in the way she preferred, but he was imprudent enough not to have this point of view formally incorporated in the new Moscow agreements and was disagreeably surprised when later Molotov again raised the whole question of Poland's status¹—solely, of course, with regard to the territories still under German jurisdiction.

The only drawback was that while Russia was simultaneously ridding herself of the Polish problem and cutting off a large slice for herself in the east, this same problem was now being inherited by Germany. But the Reich thought it was strong enough to find a solution, especially as Stalin was apparently giving it a free hand.

Towards the "Government General" of Poland

Ribbentrop had until midday on 28th September to answer this vital question. When the discussion was resumed at three in the afternoon, Stalin's proposal had been accepted, after an exchange of views between Ribbentrop and Hitler.

This was the last that was heard of a "Congress Poland." The independence of the new state would doubtless have been very precarious, hemmed in as it

¹ See p. 168.

was between its two powerful neighbours. An open breach between them would have been as fatal for it as their agreement.

The historical fact is, however, that the "Government General of Poland," as instituted by decree of Hitler on the following 8th October (ten days after the conclusion of the Moscow agreements), was the direct result of Stalin's policy and proposals. The situation of Poland would have been less terrible if, *caeteris paribus*, Stalin had not forced Hitler's hand by offering him part of Poland—and just that part inhabited by millions of Jews, nearly all of whom were to be exterminated.

The Agreements of 28th September

Besides the specific reasons why Hitler and Ribbentrop should accept Stalin's proposal, their decision was influenced by others of a more general nature.

Before going into them, a few details of the Moscow talks should be mentioned. Ribbentrop again did his best to have the upper San boundary moved, as he had unsuccessfully tried to do once before on 20th September.¹ He was again unable to overcome Stalin's resistance, although he did extract one concession. Russia was willing to supply Germany with the same amount of oil as was produced yearly by the Borislav-Drohobycz district which Ribbentrop would have liked to annex, that is, the quite considerable total of 300,000 tons.¹ Molotov's suggestion that Germany should **get** the south-western corner of Lithuania (Suwaiki) was at the same time confirmed.

¹ See pp. 62-3.

² N.-S.R., p. 109.

The territorial questions affecting the Polish frontier were settled by a " boundary treaty " concluded on 28th September and signed by Molotov and von Schulenburg on 4th October.¹ The amendments to the secret protocol of 23rd August affecting Lithuania and the Suwalki district were incorporated in a new secret protocol signed on the morning of the 29th but bearing the date of the previous day. Its text, like that of the protocol of 23rd August, is now known, and runs as follows : *" The Secret Supplementary protocol signed on August 23rd, 1939, shall be amended in item I to the effect that the territory of the Lithuanian state falls to the sphere of influence of the U.S.S.R., while, on the other hand, the province of Lublin and parts of the province of Warsaw fall to the sphere of influence of Germany. As soon as the Government of the U.S.S.R. shall take special measures on Lithuanian territory to protect its interests, the present German-Lithuanian border, for the purpose of a natural and simple boundary delineation, shall be rectified in such a way that the Lithuanian territory situated to the southwest of the line marked on the attached map should fall to Germany. Further, it is declared that the economic agreements now in force between Germany and Lithuania shall not be affected by the measures of the Soviet Union referred to above"*²

To this were added : (a) a joint declaration, for publication, advocating the immediate re-establishment of peace on the basis, of course, of the acceptance of the Soviet-German partition of Poland as an accomplished fact³ ; (b) an undertaking by the two countries to carry out a far-reaching joint economic programme " under

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 105-6.

² M.-S.R., p. 107.

³ N.-S.R., p.108.

*which the Soviet Union will supply raw materials to Germany, for which Germany in turn will make compensation through delivery of manufactured goods over an extended period"*¹; (c) a confidential agreement by which Russia undertook to facilitate the exchange of goods between Germany, Rumania, Iran, Afghanistan and the Far East, allowing the use of her own railways²; (d) a confidential protocol on the exchange of German and Soviet nationals in the territories which had been occupied³; (e) a secret protocol in which the two Governments agreed to take joint action against any unrest in Poland: "*Both parties,*" it said, "*will tolerate in their territories no Polish agitation which affects the territories of the other party. They will suppress in their territories all beginnings of such agitation and inform each other concerning suitable measures for this purpose*"⁴

The conversations of the 27th and especially those of the 28th and 29th ended in a cheerful atmosphere. Ribbentrop spoke to Hitler and consulted him by telephone, using the one in Molotov's office. Molotov gave a dinner to Ribbentrop at which Stalin and several of his chief colleagues were present, including Mikoyan, Lazar Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Beria, etc. . . . Stalin was all smiles. Ribbentrop later told one of his friends that he felt at the Kremlin as if he were among old *Partei Genossen*.⁵ He repeated this to Ciano during their meeting at Rome on 10th March. "At the gala dinner," he said, "on the German side there were present some old party members like Gauleiter Forster who, at the end of the

¹ N.-S.R. pp. 108-9.

² N.-S.R., p. 109.

³ N.-S.R., p. 106.

³ N.-S.R., p. 107.

⁵ Interrogation of the American Mission.

ceremony, said that everything had gone off as if they had been talking with old comrades.¹"

The honeymoon was in full swing. It was to last some months.

¹ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 342.

CHAPTER VI

German-Soviet Collaboration during the "Phony War"

ACCORDING to various popular accounts, Hitler and Stalin signed the pacts of August and September, 1939, with every intention of repudiating them as soon as an opportunity arose, and then of flying at each other's throats.

There is no documentary evidence for this assumption. Hitler and Stalin were under no illusions about each other, and there was nothing sentimental in their estimate of each other's character. Both were well aware that the pact between them was founded on self-interest, and that self-interest could destroy it. If the *volte-face* of August had gone a little to their heads it was because they were still adding up the very considerable profits which it had brought them. There was, too, a certain amount of *Schadenfreude* on both sides at the thought of the consternation which the news would cause among statesmen and ordinary people in London, Paris and all over the world, since such a turn of events was the last thing anybody believed possible.

This "realism" was, of course, at once the strength and the weakness of their new-found friendship. At a conference with his army chiefs on 23rd November, 1939, Hitler quoted Bismarck as his authority for the statement that "*pacts last only as long as they are useful in fulfilling their purpose*" and added that Russia for her

part would observe them only " *so long as she considers them to be to her advantage*"¹

Nevertheless, Hitler and Stalin were convinced that the vital interests of the two Governments could overlap for a considerable time. Hitler had to " digest " Poland, overthrow France, and vanquish Britain, after which he would be in control of the whole of Europe behind a " wall " running from the Baltic frontiers " *to the Danube estuary*" Victory would also secure for him those colonial resources outside Europe which he later mentioned to Serrano Suñer during the latter's visit to Berlin in September, 1940.² This programme was quite enough to put the Russian problem into cold storage for a long time to come, even if some day he thought of expanding it. All the evidence of Hitler's intimates agrees in attributing to him the idea, which he had very much at heart during the first few months of the pact, that the Russian agreement " *was a very great act of diplomacy* " and that it was capable of lasting a long time.³ Goering clearly remembered that in August, 1939, Hitler told him " *I am determined to work with Russia for a long time.*" " Hitler himself told Mussolini when they met on the Brenner that his decision to collaborate with Russia was the result of prolonged deliberation and would not be changed : " the Fuehrer has decided to maintain friendly relations with that country in future."⁶

¹ N.C.A., III, p. 575.

² See the report of this meeting by P. Schmidt, the interpreter, in *The Spanish Government and the Axis* (U.S. Department of State, 4th March, 1946), doc. No. V.

³ Interrogation by the American Mission.

⁴ D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, p. 18 of the off-print.

⁵ March 18th, 1940, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 364 ; the same note occurs in the Ribbentrop-Ciano meeting of 19th June, 1940, *ibid.*, p. 374.

Hitler's Opinion of Stalin

In one of the versions which have reached us of Hitler's speech to the military chiefs on 22nd August, 1939, just before Ribbentrop left for Moscow, Hitler gave what was intended to be a very flattering opinion of Stalin by considering him as his equal. "*Stalin and I are the only people who have considered the future*"; in other words, the only people capable of building a structure that would last.

Hitler thought of history as a drama in which the parts were played by distinguished people. He could see only "*three great statesmen*" himself, Stalin and Mussolini.¹ He was wrong about Mussolini because his judgment was warped by friendship. But there was no such bias where Stalin was concerned, and Hitler was convinced that the pacts would be observed *as long as Stalin was alive*. He expressed this opinion to Admiral Raeder at the conference on 25th November, 1939 : "*As long as Stalin is in power, it is certain that she [Russia] will adhere strictly to the pact made. Her political attitude may change after years of building up her internal strength, particularly if Stalin is overthrown or dies*"² Hitler "was a great admirer of Stalin and was only afraid that he might be replaced by some extremist" This **also** to a great **extent** explains why, after the armistice with France, **the**

¹ This version of the speech of 22nd August was not presented at Nuremberg by the American prosecutor (see his declaration at the hearing of 26th November, 1945, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, I I, p. 286 and cf. N.C.A., 1, 397). Certain passages have been published in *Le Monde*, 25th November, 1945 ; complete text in N.C.A., V I I, 752-4.

² *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1939, p. 47.

bookshops were painstakingly stripped by the "Otto list" of all Trotsky's works while Stalin's were left alone,¹ and why the German censorship prohibited any "discussion of Stalin"² until June, 1941. Again, on the last day of 1940, when military preparations against Russia were well under way, he wrote to Mussolini: "*I do not anticipate that the Russians will take the initiative as long as Stalin is alive and as long as we ourselves do not have any serious crises*"³

But Hitler was not quite so much under the spell of the Russian pact as were Goering and, particularly, Ribbentrop, both of whom claimed the honour of being the first to suggest the idea of a *rapprochement* to Hitler.

When Ciano went to Berlin on 1st October, a few days after the signing of the second Moscow pact, he found Ribbentrop to be "*all out for the Russians*" and wild in his praise of the Bolsheviks.⁴

This attitude was also based on an error—the same as was made by Russia's Western allies after June, 1941. On his return from Moscow, Ribbentrop told Hitler that "*the Communist revolution had reached a reasonable stage of development*" and that an understanding with the Bolsheviks was therefore possible. On 1st October he assured Ciano that Stalin had become the real champion of Russian nationalism,⁵ and shortly afterwards, in March, 1940, "*that Stalin had given up the idea of a world revolution*" and that "*Russia was not only on the way to becoming a normal national state but had already gone some*

¹ For this list, see *Biblio* 1939, Paris, Messageries Hachette, 1940.

² Jean Zay, *Souvenirs et Solitudes*, Paris, Julliard, 1945, p. 100.

³ *Lettres secrètes Hilter-Mussolini*, p. 109.

⁴ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, p. 162.

⁵ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 316.

distance along this path."¹ Hitler expressed similar views a few days later, although he spoke rather less positively. During their meeting at the Brenner he said to Mussolini: " It seems that Russia too is undergoing a far-reaching evolution, and the path which Stalin has taken appears to lead towards a kind of Slav-Muscovite nationalism and to be a move away from Bolshevism of a Jewish-International character."⁸ Again in March, on the 21 st, one of Ribbentrop's envoys explained to M. Gafencu, then Rumanian Foreign Minister, what his chief in the Wilhelmstrasse thought of political developments in the U.S.S.R. Ribbentrop "*came back from Moscow convinced that Russia was no longer a Bolshevik state but, under the clearsighted leadership of its Fuehrer, was making giant strides to a nationalist regime fundamentally socialist.*" Was not the exceptionally keen interest shown by the Soviet leaders in the ancient frontiers of Holy Russia an additional proof of their nationalistic evolution ? Such a regime, whose understanding of the political trend of the Axis steadily increased, and whose regard for the Jews steadily diminished had, according to Ribbentrop, all the qualifications necessary to collaborate in maintaining peace in Eastern Europe."³

This illusion was also shared by Mussolini, for in October, 1939, he intended to explain to the Italian people that Bolshevism was finished in Russia and had been replaced *by a sort of Slav Fascism.*⁴

¹ *Gam's Diplomatic Papers* p. 342. It was such views as this which inspired the Germans to contact the Soviet representatives with a view to a *rapprochement* ; see for example N.-S.R., p. 35.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

² G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, London, Muller, 1945, P- 38.

⁴ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P. 167.

Stalin Continues the Policy of Rapallo

All this was an optical illusion arising out of the kind of half-truths which increase a blunder by confusing the issues. But in Hitler's Russian policy there was another thread, leading back to the Bismarckian tradition. Hitler himself was not much affected by it, but it had retained a strong influence in military¹ and diplomatic circles, especially at the Reich Embassy in Moscow.

For his part, Stalin had good reason to believe that the agreements he had concluded would remain in force for quite a long time. He was determined not to allow Russia to be drawn into the war, and as he foresaw that it would be a long one, the agreement with Hitler would probably last as long as the war itself, or at least up to its final decisive stage. This opinion was shared by Mussolini, who at the beginning of September, 1940, thought there might be war between the Axis and Russia, but only " *between 1945 and 1950.* "²

If Hitler could quote Bismarck as an authority,³ Stalin too had a tradition to renew—that of Rapallo. It was one which he had never abandoned, and which he had always wished to revive. On 31st August before the Supreme Council, Molotov made a point of saying that the policy of the 1922 and 1926 agreements with Germany had broken down after 1933 in spite of the Soviet Government's desire to continue and even to expand it.

¹ See p. 6, note 1.

² Ciano's *Diary, 1939-43*, p. 289.

³ For their part, the Soviet State Publishing House undertook the publication of Bismarck's memoirs during the autumn of 1940, in the " Library of Foreign Politics " series.

The Joint Campaign for Peace

The close collaboration between Moscow and Berlin from the beginning of April, 1939, to June, 1941, took place within this framework and against this background. It extended into every field : political, economic and military.

Political collaboration between Soviet Russia and Hitler's Germany went much farther than is generally supposed. It came to a head in the campaign for " immediate peace " just after the signing of the agreements of 27-28th September, 1939. The two partners had then decided that, as the Polish problem had been settled " *once and for all,*" there was no longer any good reason why the war should continue, and that it should be ended " *as quickly as possible.*" If Britain and France would not consent to another Munich, they alone would be " *responsible for the continuation of the war*"¹

This raises a problem which, in the absence of documents, cannot be finally solved. Was Stalin " sincere " when he agreed to join the crusade for peace ? This is a good example of a false question, and it is mentioned here only because attempts have already been made to ask it. Since Stalin foresaw a long war, why did he support the German peace campaign ?

One possible answer is that, knowing the attitude of Britain and France made peace impossible, Stalin found it much easier to back Hitler's manoeuvre since it **was** doomed to fail in any case. But this explanation **seems** inadequate. In theory, a long war would undoubtedly have been to **the** advantage of the Soviet Union **and its**

¹ Joint declaration published on 29th September, 1939.

leaders as it might have left them holding the balance.¹ But Stalin never lost his sense of reality, even on **the** long-term view. The rapid conclusion of the Polish campaign caught him by surprise² and showed him **the** strength of the German Army. And to this picture **was** added the torpor of Britain and France. Perhaps peace was possible in spite of all appearances to the contrary, and if it was, the U.S.S.R. would be represented at **the** new Munich, where she too would dictate her terms.

Stalin was not content to give purely formal support to Hitler's peace campaign. He might have confined his help to official diplomatic channels. But he actually went a good deal farther by bringing in to the campaign all the machinery and all the parties of the Communist International. The Moscow agreements of 28th September did not compel him to do this. But, without wasting a moment, he sent the Communist party of every country into action as early as the end of September, using every legal or underground means, or both at the same time, to prepare the ground for the peace proposals which Hitler eventually made in his Danzig speech of 6th October. The main incidents in the mobilisation of the Communist International **were** the letter sent by the French Communist deputies to President Herriot on 1st October, 1939, and the speech of Gallacher, the Communist M.P., in the House of Commons. As the Kremlin ordered the mobilisation, this must have been part of its policy, and **Stalin must** therefore have accepted **the** idea of an " **immediate** peace." The Communist parties under **his** **command**

¹ See below (pp. 101-2) for statements by Czech Communists to President Benes.

² See pp. 52-3.

went on agitating for it all through the period of the " phony war."

But that was not all. The Soviet Press commented on and amplified the joint declaration of 28th September immediately after its publication. On 30th September *Pravda* said : " There is no justification for a war between France and Britain on the one side and Germany on the other, a war which is quite meaningless . . . It is up to France and Britain to end a war which was begun against the will of their peoples." If the efforts of Russia and Germany to make peace were unsuccessful, it was clear that " the blame would rest on France and Britain, their governments, and their ruling classes." *Izvestia* took the same line. On 1st October a further editorial in *Pravda* added that " the hostility which the imperialist war-mongers have fomented between the two greatest countries in Europe is now at an end."¹

The *Temps* of 29th November, 1939, published the alleged minutes of a meeting of the Moscow Politbureau on 19th August, which the Havas agency was said to have received from Moscow via Geneva. These minutes were frequently quoted afterwards, but they were undoubtedly a forgery, as is frequently the case with documents of this type put out by professional anti-Communists. It was alleged that at the Politbureau meeting Stalin explained quite openly his plan for prolonging the war for as long as possible so that when the two groups of belligerents were exhausted he could touch off the " world revolution." Stalin immediately gave an interview to *Pravda*, which published his statement on 30th November. It is not **the** document **itself**

¹ These extracts were also used by Radio Moscow and were reprinted in *Europe Nouvelle*, 7th October, 1939.

which is interesting so much as Stalin's reaction. After flatly denying the Havas report as "an impudent and criminal lie," Stalin countered it with the following facts : " (i) *It was not Germany who attacked Britain and France, but Britain and France who attacked Germany;* (2) *After military operations had begun, Germany approached the British and French Governments with an offer of peace. This had had the support of the Soviet Union ;* (3) *The British and French Governments had brusquely rejected the German proposal and the U.S.S.R.'s efforts for a settlement ; that was the truth.*"¹

This argument remained unchanged for the first six months of 1940. When the Soviet Press from time to time reverted to it, it expressed itself in very violent terms. On 26th January *Pravda* published an article under the heading " Silence on the Maginot Line," a few passages of which are worth quoting : " *The war was declared by Britain and France. The peace proposals were not rejected by Germany but by Britain and France, who insist not only on continuing the war but on spreading it.*" After branding the Anglo-French as " aggressors " for wanting to drag the neutrals into the war, the Soviet newspaper came out with the following reprimand : " *The Anglo-French imperialists wish to turn this war into a world war. They wish to plunge the whole of humanity into a sea of suffering and hardship. They have chosen a dangerous path, for it conceals consequences which will be disastrous for those who have instigated a new world slaughter.*"

¹ In an English-language broadcast from Radio Moscow on 29th November, 1939, Stalin's statement was summarised as follows : " Firstly, the entire responsibility for the war falls on Great Britain and France. Secondly, the Soviet Union has supported Germany's peace offers to the Allies, as well as offers to mediate from neutral countries."

Molotov reverted to the same theme in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 29th March, 1940, when he attacked exclusively the enemies of Hitler's Germany : " We know", he said, " that the desire of Germany for peace shown at the end of last year was thwarted by the French and British Governments . . . Germany has clearly become a dangerous rival to Britain and France, the chief imperialist powers in Europe. It was for this reason that, under the pretext of fulfilling their obligations to Poland, these two countries declared war on Germany . . . The British and French Governments have announced that their aim in this war was to crush and dismember Germany . . . They have shown increasing hostility towards the U.S.S.R., since the U.S.S.R. has refused to become the accomplice of Britain and France in carrying out their anti-German policy."

This was the attitude of the U.S.S.R. after the end of September, 1939. If the German peace proposals had been accepted, the U.S.S.R. would at least not have come away with empty hands, as she would have obtained the three Baltic countries and eastern Poland through the agreements of August and September.

Political and Ideological Aid to Germany

The Kremlin's support of Germany was not confined to direct action but extended into the field of ideology, which it apparently regarded as peculiarly its own. From 1939 to 1940 Molotov made several speeches, the gist of which was elaborated both by the Soviet **Press** and by all the Communist parties in their propaganda, legal and underground. These themes were : ideological differences should not stand in the way of **close**

collaboration with Hitler's Germany ; the ideological war between democracy and fascism was ridiculous and uncivilised ; Europe needed a strong Germany ; Hitler's Germany went to war in order to break the chains of Versailles ; the chief responsibility for the war therefore rested on Britain and France, and they alone wished to prolong and spread it ; the war which these two countries persisted in carrying on was an imperialist war, dictated solely by their desire to hold on to their colonies without having to surrender any of them to Germany.¹

This ideological support was backed by very definite political action. From 25th October, 1939, Russia openly supported the German arguments against the British blockade, particularly by her note of protest on 10th December, 1939. She came out in favour of the Belgian and Dutch Governments' efforts to mediate on 7th November, 1939. In his speech of 31st August, 1939, Molotov himself denounced the United States' decision to raise the embargo on war materials, and accused them of wanting " *to lengthen the war* " On 16th September the Soviet Government, which six months earlier had refused to accept the *fait accompli* in Czechoslovakia, officially recognised Slovakia, welcomed a plenipotentiary from that country to Moscow in December, and at the same time asked M. Fierlinger, the Czechoslovak minister, to leave Soviet territory.

According to the German documents, Russia showed

¹ Speeches by Molotov to the Supreme Council on 31st August, 1939, 31st October, 1939, and 31st July, 1940 ; speech by Molotov at a meeting of the Moscow Soviet on 6th November, 1939. The suggestion that the ideological differences between Bolshevism and Nazism were not such as to prevent collaboration between the two regimes on questions of world policy was frequently made by the Soviet representatives during their early negotiations with the Germans. (N.-S.R., pp. 2, 14, 60.)

"understanding" ¹during the **Wehrmacht's** campaign in Norway. When the German Ambassador **broke** the news of the operation to Molotov, he wished **the Reich** troops "*complete success*" ²The Soviet Press did its **best** to justify the German expedition. On 4th April *Izvestia* gave it the official blessing of the Moscow Government: "*There can be no doubt that Germany has been forced to act in Denmark and Norway because of prior moves by Britain and France.*"* These two countries wished to undermine Germany's military positions and at the same time to strengthen their own. The objection has, of course, been raised that Germany has violated the rules of international law, and has treated the pact of non-aggression with Denmark as a scrap of paper. It is absurd to begin wailing about the legality or illegality of Germany's actions in Scandinavia when the sovereignty of the Scandinavian countries has been violated by Britain and France. *War has its own logic which is stronger than any other.*" The official organ of the Soviets went farther. Referring to the attitude of Britain and France

¹ N.C.A., VI, p. 983.

² N.-S.R., p. 138.

³ This was the official argument adopted by Berlin, which devoted to it its fourth *White Book*, published at the end of April, 1940. The Wilhelmstrasse used a number of extracts from this in a pamphlet intended for use as propaganda in France just before the Flanders offensive, and entitled *Le coup de main tenté par l'Angleterre contre la Norvege*. This German-Soviet thesis has been finally demolished by the documents produced at Nuremberg, which prove that the German plan to occupy bases on the Norwegian coast dates back to October, 1939, and that the occupation of Norway, with Quisling's help, was contemplated as early as December. (See *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1939, pp. 24 and 58; *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. III, pp. 264-74; N.C.A., III, pp. 32-5, VI, pp. 815-16, 884-5, 885-7, 891-2, 928. The first concrete measures for operation "Weseruebung" date from January, 1940—*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. III, p. 274; N.C.A., VI, p. 883.)

to the Russo-Finnish conflict, it denounced its essentially anti-German character. Ruling circles in London and Paris had actually thought of sending an expeditionary corps to help Finland. " But if this famous ' corps' was under orders to land in Finland—and we are not at all sure that it was—it would no doubt have taken two or three months to do so, by which time the Finnish ' Whites ' would have been crushed once and for all. These troops would have remained in Norway and Sweden simply to occupy a number of important strategic positions there, *force these two countries into the war, and create a new front against Germany. Under the banner of the fight against Bolshevism, Britain and France wanted to get a strong foothold in Scandinavia in order to spread the war against Germany.* This scheme was wrecked by the Peace of Moscow.¹ The Allies were then forced to consider obtaining control of the neutral seaboard of Norway and stopping exports from Scandinavia to Germany.² It was no longer a question of helping Finland. The U.S.S.R. had torn off the mask and what they now wanted was *to spread the war against Germany*"² Thus what the Soviet Press was chiefly concerned to denounce was the anti-German strategy of the Anglo-French in Scandinavia. It is not surprising that about half-way through February Moscow and Berlin agreed not to allow Sweden to be driven into the anti-German camp. There was an exchange of views on this subject

¹ Reference to the peace signed in Moscow between Finland and the U.S.S.R. on 12th March, 1940.

² Cf. Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, London, Cassell, 1948, p. 430, where this interpretation is confirmed; see also A. Rossi, *Physiologie du Parti Communiste Francois*, Paris, Self, 1948, note J, pp. 437-40.

³ *Izvestia* renewed its attacks on the " Anglo-French incendiaries " on 23rd April, 1940.

in Moscow between representatives of the two governments, followed by a declaration that they both "*had the same interest in maintaining Swedish neutrality.*"¹

Moscow and Ankara

One of the most important aims of Soviet diplomacy during this period was *to prevent the conclusion of an agreement between Turkey and the Western democracies.* It was of course true that, besides doing a good turn to Germany, the rulers of the Kremlin were principally working for a solution of the Dardanelles problem which would fit in with their own plans.

The Turkish Foreign Minister had arrived in the Soviet capital to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with Russia on 25th September, 1939. Negotiations were suspended during Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow but were resumed as soon as he left. They lasted until just before M. Sarajoglou left Russia on 18th October.

Agreement was impossible because Stalin and Molotov made their main condition for signing the pact "*the definite exclusion of all possibility of a conflict with Germany.*"² The pact was not to operate if Germany attacked Turkey. So on 19th October Turkey concluded a pact of mutual assistance with Britain and France. Although she had taken the precaution of inserting a supplementary protocol making it clear that under no circumstances would her commitments allow her to be drawn into an armed conflict with Russia, the Soviet rulers launched a violent campaign against the Ankara

¹ Tass communique of 3rd March, 1940; and see N.-S.R., pp₂ 140-1.
² N.-S.R., p. 97.

Government. It was accused of becoming the lackey of Britain and France ; of being a party to the manoeuvres of those who wanted to continue and spread the war ; of abandoning its neutrality, for which it would probably repent.¹ The Turkish leaders resisted the Soviet Government's threats, which undoubtedly played an important part in determining their attitude during the war.²

When hostilities began on 2nd September Molotov, " after consultation with Stalin," informed von Schulenburg that the Soviet Government " *was prepared to work for the permanent neutrality of Turkey as desired by Germany.*"³ Germany had therefore nothing to fear from this quarter. On 24th October von Ritter was able to assure Berlin that the Russian Government would fulfil its obligations *and would not allow either the passage of French or British ships through the Dardenelles or an anti-German attitude on the part of Turkey.*⁴ In its issue of 25th April, 1940, *Pravda* denounced the " intrigues of the British and French imperialists " in Turkey, which aimed at turning the country into " *a military and economic base against Germany.*

¹ See especially Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31st October, 1939.

² According to Pertinax (*Lis Fossoyeurs*, New York, 1943, I, p. 130) the Turkish Government was ready to give way to the Kremlin's demands but was prevented from doing so by the intervention of the French Government. There appears to be no doubt that the French did intervene on this occasion but we must apparently exclude the possibility that Ankara was inclined to apply to Germany the same safeguarding clause as had been formally included in the supplementary protocol to the agreements of 19th October referring to Russia.

³ *N.-S.R.*, p. 86 and cf. pp. 87-8.

⁴ *N.C.A.*, VI, p. 979. After 8th October von Ritter was in charge of the German economic delegation in Moscow.

⁵ This article in *Pravda* had an extremely favourable reception in the German Press. In a reference to it, the *National Zeitung* of 3rd May in its turn vindicated Moscow's attitude to Turkey.

In exchange for all this assistance Germany eventually supported the U.S.S.R.'s action against Finland, to whom she had given military aid in 1918. At the first signs of a dispute between Moscow and Helsinki, the Wilhelmstrasse immediately informed its representative in Helsinki that Germany " *was hardly in a position, in any case, to intervene in the Russian-Finnish conversations* " ¹ This was because the German Government was in future bound by the secret pact of 23rd August, in which Finland had been assigned to the Soviet sphere of interest. But as the Wilhelmstrasse could not disclose this, it explained to its representatives abroad, in a memorandum dated 2nd December, the arguments they should use to justify Germany's attitude in the conflict. First, there were the various security questions raised by the Russians with regard to Leningrad and the Baltic. Next, Finland had taken it as " *axiomatic* " that Germany would be opposed to Russia, she had refused to sign a non-aggression pact with Germany, and she felt drawn towards Britain. ¹ These three crimes were enough to condemn her. A few days later additional instructions insisted that " *in conversation, sympathy is to be expressed for the Russian point of view.* " ² As there was some pro-Finnish agitation in the Scandinavian countries, they were warned by Berlin " *not to listen to the blandishments of League of Nations evangelists and British extremists* " ⁴ Thus any hopes the Finnish Government might at first have had of German help vanished. On 8th December the Finnish minister in Rome had confided to Ciano that Germany " *had supplied arms to Finland from the*

¹ N.-S.R., p. 122 (9th October, 1939).

² N.-S.R., pp. 127-8.

³ N.-S.R., p. 130.

⁴ D.N.B. communique, 7th December, 1939.

booty captured during the Polish campaign,"¹ but on 12th December Hitler yielded to the Naval General Staff's request for a "clear-cut policy" towards Finland and for the suspension of arms deliveries there.² The shipment of arms to Sweden was to be stopped unless the Swedish Government gave a written guarantee that they would not be transferred to Finland.³ A few aircraft ordered from Italy before the war and on their way to Helsinki were seized in Germany.⁴

At his second meeting with Molotov in Berlin (13th November, 1940), Hitler pointed out that "during the Russo-Finnish war, despite the danger that Allied bases might be established in Scandinavia, Germany had meticulously kept her obligations toward Russia" and that "in this connection she had even gone so far as to deny to the Finnish President the use of a German cable for a radio address to America."⁵

In Bucharest Germany smoothed the way for the Russian claim to Bessarabia through the diplomatic action of Fabricius in December, 1939, and May, 1940.

German-Soviet Military Collaboration

"For the first time for fifty years" the German leaders said in November, 1939, "Germany has no fears in the East and has not to consider a war on two fronts."⁷ There is

¹ Ciano's Diary, 1939-43, P- 182.

² and ³ Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 12th December, 1939, p. 58.

⁴ L. Simoni, *Berlino Ambasciata d' Italia*, p. 36, under the date 13th December.

⁵ N.-S.R., pp. 240-1.

⁶ G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 339.

⁷ Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939, conference of 10th November, p. 49.

no doubt that this was the U.S.S.R.'s most important and most decisive military contribution to Germany, Hitler expressed his satisfaction with it in his speech at Munich on 8th November, 1939, and this weighty argument was used by the German leaders to allay Mussolini's misgivings and overcome his hesitation, for in a letter of 4th January, 1940, he had warned Hitler against the new German policy.¹ When General Bodenschatz, Goering's close friend and his liaison officer with Hitler, was discussing this question with Count Magistrati, he explained that "the agreements were necessary so as to secure our rear for the duration of the war with Great Britain"²; and three weeks later Hitler also told the Count that success in the West depended on "*Germanys being on good terms with Russia*."² The D.N.B. communique, issued on 1st March, 1940, on the occasion of Sumner Welles' visit to Berlin, stated that even if Britain succeeded in coercing some of the neutrals into joining the war, this would by no means compensate the Western powers for "*what Germany had gained through friendship with the Soviet Union*" which "*protected her from military action in her rear*" and guaranteed her "*economic security*" In a speech to the Air Force units of the Hitler Youth a few weeks before the Flanders offensive, Goering was bubbling over with optimism: "Germany," he told them "is ready to strike . . . Secure on her flanks and in her rear, the mighty German Army facing England and France in the West forms in the air, on land, and on sea, a solid

¹ *Leltres secrites Hitler-Mussolini*, pp. 54-6.

² L. Simoni, *Berlino Ambasciata d' Italia*, p. 53 (10th January, 1940).
¹⁹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6 (2nd February, 1940).

block of steel. It is there that the decision must be made."¹

Hitler was ready to risk war with the Western powers only on condition—and this was vital—that he could count on the benevolent neutrality of Soviet Russia.² Without this condition *he would not have attacked either in the East or in the West*. Russia's neutrality was essential for the rapid annihilation of Poland and also for the *Blitzkrieg* against France, planned in the autumn of 1939 and carried out in May and June, 1940 ; for if there had been no agreement with Russia, Germany would have had to tie up " *at least fifty divisions* " to guard the eastern frontier.³

An essential factor in Hitler's strategical calculations was that he should be able to withdraw almost all the troops stationed along the eastern frontier when the attack on France began. As soon as the Polish campaign was over, he thought that victory in the West was assured since Germany " *was able to bring all her strength to bear in the West, leaving only a few covering troops in the East* " ⁴ Several months later Ribbentrop explained Hitler's views on this subject to Ciano. The Fuehrer, he said, thought that in spite of the dissimilarity between the two regimes it had been possible to conclude " a trade agreement with Russia, and to keep *a number of divisions* free in the West which otherwise would have had to be used as cover against Russia." ⁵ What hap-

¹ Berlin, 4th April, 1940.

² Sec pp. 44-50.

³ Statement by Goering. Sec D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, p. 17 of the off-print.

⁴ "Memorandum and Directives for the conduct of the war in the West," 9th October, 1939; almost certainly by Hitler. See N.C.A., VII, p. 802.

⁵ Ciano's *Diplomatic Papers*, p. 345.

pened in May, 1940, shows how well-founded Hitler's view was : " *The Russian front was almost stripped during the campaign in France—between 5 and 8 German divisions were retained there*"¹ This statement by Goering tallies exactly with the figures given by Keitel at Nuremberg : " During the campaign in the West, *there were seven divisions on the Russian front. Seven divisions from East Prussia to the Carpathians, two of which were transferred to the West during the campaign but later on were transported back again*"²

Thus the German-Soviet pact and the way in which it was implemented by Stalin were among the most important factors in Hitler's strategy and therefore in the French defeat.

On their side, the Soviet leaders realised how important their contribution was, and turned this knowledge to their advantage. Immediately after the great German victories on the Western front, when they might very well have wondered what Hitler was going to do with his divisions, now disengaged and flushed with victory, Molotov thought it might be useful to remind Hitler that the pact with the U.S.S.R. " *gave Germany an assurance of tranquillity in the East*" It was a discreet but unambiguous way of referring to services rendered.² He later repeated it more forcibly during his talks with Hitler in Berlin. At the first talk he declared that he " concurred in the opinion of the Fuehrer that both partners had derived substantial benefits from the

¹ D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, p. 17 of the off-print.

² *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, vol. X, p. 525.

³ Text of a speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31st July, 1940, printed in clandestine edition of the *Cahiers du bolchevisme* in the latter part of 1940.

Soviet-German agreement" and particularly emphasised that " Germany had received a secure *hinterland* that, as was generally known, *had been of great importance for the further course of events during the year of war.*"¹ On the following day he pointed out to Hitler that " if he drew up a balance sheet of the situation after the defeat of France," the result would be that " *the Germantr-Russian agreement had not been without influence upon the German victories.*"²

In addition to this supremely important strategical factor which, by allowing Germany to fight on a single front, made the war itself inevitable, the German and Soviet leaders took a number of steps towards closer military co-operation. The nature and extent of this co-operation was seen during the Polish campaign.⁸ Immediately afterwards, in the rather heady atmosphere generated by the August and September agreements, German military circles were considering a far-reaching programme of mutual assistance. The plans of the German Admiralty were ambitious, and included buying submarines from Russia, repairing German warships in Russian shipyards, and arming auxiliary cruisers there ; in exchange, the Russians were to receive the plans of modern German cruisers like the *Bismarck* and were to buy the hulls of uncompleted battleships.⁴ On 10th October, 1939, Admiral Raeder informed Hitler that a German auxiliary cruiser was being equipped at Murmansk and that the Russians were willing to place a " northern naval base " near this

¹ Meeting of 12th November, N.-S.R., p. 232.

² Meeting of 13th November, N.-S.R., p. 236.

³ See chapter IV.

⁴ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1939, under the date of 23rd September, p. 21.

port at Germany's disposal.¹ It was in fact used by the German Navy up to the beginning of September, 1940. The German Admiralty then gave up the base "on the Murmansk coast" on the grounds that it could in future make use of the Norwegian bases, and expressed "its gratitude" to the Russians.²

It is also clear that the Russians asked to be given plans of German armaments (anti-aircraft batteries, heavy gun turrets for battleships, etc). This deal formed an integral part of the economic negotiations begun immediately after the September agreements by the German mission under Karl von Ritter. Stalin dealt with these questions personally.²

How far were these projects effectively carried out? There were certainly some instances of active collaboration, as when the Russians offered the base east of Murmansk or connived at allowing the *Bremen* to return to the Elbe estuary. The German Admiralty stressed the help given by Russia on this occasion "by keeping foreign shipping in Murmansk for three days after the departure of the *Bremen*"⁴ Both Admiralties discussed "practical agreements" for the supply of fuel to German submarines and the use of the "northern sea-route"⁵ by German ships. The German Admiralty was very keen on this last point and negotiations began towards the end of December, 1939.⁶ On 6th February,

¹ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, p. 25. See also *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, XIII, pp. 219-21.

² N.-S.R., p. 185.

³ See on this subject the disclosures of Dr. Harold C. Deutsch, head of the Research Mission of the O.S.S. in Germany, in *La Bataille*, 30th April, 1947, and cf. D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, p. 16 of the off-print.

⁴ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1939, p. 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1939, p. 64.

⁶ N.C.A., VI, p. 981.

1940, the German Naval Attaché in Moscow announced that the Russians were willing to allow a German auxiliary cruiser, "Ship 45,"¹ to sail to the Far East by the "Siberian route." A temporary stiffening of Molotov's attitude at the beginning of April seemed to bring them back to where they started,² but preparations for the voyage were eventually resumed "with Russia's co-operation"³ and "Ship 45" sailed on 12th August, 1940, "by the Siberian sea-route, with Russian help."⁴ The German auxiliary cruiser was thus able to cross the Pacific without risk and there raid British ships as a privateer. For their part, the Germans handed over the *Luetzow* to the Russians,⁵ and in the Leningrad shipyards technicians took over the construction or repair of some of the big ships of the Soviet Navy. In November, 1940, Admiral Raeder was convinced that Russia would not attack Germany on the grounds that she "was starting to build up her navy with the help of Germany."⁶ They were still working together in May, 1941. In a memorandum of the 15th of this month Schnurre stated that "construction of the cruiser *L* in Leningrad is proceeding according to plan, with German supplies coming in as scheduled. Approximately 70 German engineers and fitters are working on the cruiser in Leningrad under the direction of Admiral Feige."⁷

As all this bargaining was primarily the concern of the military experts, it was scarcely mentioned in the

¹ N.C.A. p. 982.

² *Ibid.*, p. 983.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 985.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 986. The conduct of the Soviet authorities was, in general, "cordial and co-operative."

⁵ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1939, p. 38.

⁶ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1940, p. 124.

⁷ N.-S.R., p. 340.

Gerjnan diplomatic documents which are now published or known. On the other hand, there are many hints of what was going on in the minutes of the conferences between the German naval chiefs and Hitler. From all the available evidence, however, the military collaboration between Germany and Russia does not seem to have gone very far in the technical field. Stalin asked for a great deal and was ready to give the necessary *quid pro quo*, but notwithstanding his eagerness to get hold of prototypes and the secret manufacturing processes of certain German weapons, he was to some extent restrained by the need not to endanger the profits he hoped to make out of his policy of "neutrality." Over and above all this there was Hitler's deep distrust of Soviet Russia, once he had sobered down after his early successes. When the German military chiefs, especially the naval chiefs, insisted on going as far as possible to satisfy Soviet requests in this field, Hitler turned obstinate, refused to give way to their demands, wavered, and ended up by rejecting almost all of them. On 10th October, 1939, he turned down the proposal to build submarines in Russia¹ or to buy them from her²; on 8th December he forbade the sale to the Russians of the *Seydlitz*, the *Prinz Eugen*, and the plans of the *Bismarck*.^{*} He also turned a deaf ear to the German Admiralty's suggestion for direct co-operation with the Russians in Norway.⁴ Without being altogether negligible, the balance sheet is here less impressive than in other fields.

¹ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1939, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, 1939, p. 44.

³ *Ibid.*, 1939, p. 52 and cf. 1940, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1939, p. 27 and especially 1940, p. 20.

The Mobilisation of the Communist International Behind Hitler

Apart from the strategic results of the German-Soviet pact,¹ Russia's most effective contribution to Germany's military successes was undoubtedly the mobilization of the Communist parties against the war, which after the pact of 23rd August had become essentially "imperialist." Directives on the new policy had gone out to all the parties belonging to the Communist International from three sources : Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31st August, 1939 ; an article by George Dimitrov in October, to which the widest publicity was given throughout the world ; and the manifesto of the Communist International issued on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary of the October Revolution. In theory, the war was to be opposed in all the belligerent countries without exception. But even omitting the fact that the bracketing together of Britain, France and Germany was already of some help to Hitler, the campaign against the war was in practice effective only in the democratic countries. In Germany the Hitler régime had much less to fear from Communist opposition, for it had been almost entirely liquidated years before. Moreover, at this period the basic policy of the German Communists was to do everything in their power to support the German-Soviet pact. Their party leaders, who had fled to Moscow, used language against Britain and France—and against them exclusively—which sometimes surpassed even the Nazi Press in its unparalleled violence. One of them, a secretary of the Communist International named Walter Ulbricht, launched an attack on the Social Democratic leader Rudolf Hilferding, who was

¹ See pp. 90-4.

guilty of having told Socialists it was their duty to fight with the Western democracies against Hitler.¹ After taking him sharply to task, Walter Ulbricht came out against any attempt to prolong the war. "The German Government," he wrote, "announced its desire for friendly relations with the Soviet Union, whereas the Anglo-French warmongers wished to make war on her. It is in the interests of the Soviet people and the German workers to thwart Britain's plans. All they want is a rapid end to the war . . ." The slogan of "immediate peace" was used by all the Communist parties between September, 1939, and June, 1941.

In March, 1940, Ribbentrop expressed to Mussolini his satisfaction at the new attitude of the U.S.S.R. on the grounds that "since the pact was signed, the Soviet has stopped trying to interfere in our internal affairs"² The U.S.S.R. had in fact interfered through the Communist International, but in a way that fitted in perfectly with Berlin's own interests and plans.⁴

¹ In an article on *The meaning of the war* which appeared in *Never Vorwaerts*, organ of the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party. Rudolf Hilferding, a refugee in the southern zone of France, was afterwards handed over to the Gestapo by the Vichy Government.

² *Die Welt* (organ of the Communist International published in Stockholm), 9th February, 1940. Walter Ulbricht is now the leader of the "United Socialist Party" in Eastern Germany, and in this capacity is conducting a virulent campaign against the Social Democrat leader Kurt Schumacher, who spent long years in a concentration camp for his opposition to the Hitler régime. And so it goes on . . .

² *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 343.

⁴ If one is to believe a Havas dispatch of 29th October, 1939, the collaboration between Communists and Nazis in Germany must have gone quite far during this period. In the Bochum steel works a factory newspaper is said to have appeared under the title "The Swastika, The Hammer and the Sickle." It preached a "crusade against the bankers of Wall Street and the City."

The Italian Communists adopted a similar attitude, their slogan being " Italy must keep out of the war ! " As Mussolini was inclined to join in on the German side, their propaganda was in practice useful, even though in theory their policy of neutrality was supposed to be applied uniformly to all the belligerent countries. But the Communist International came out against the war wherever there were large numbers of Italian emigrants, as in France, Tunisia, the U.S.A., and the Argentine. It supported any defeatist and isolationist argument, and thus joined forces with Hitler's " fifth column," which in these countries was very strong.

Through Gallacher's speech in the House of Commons (3rd October, 1939), the British Communist Party demanded that negotiations for peace should begin immediately. In January, 1940, it went so far as to organise a " People's Congress " which voted against the " imperialist war " and the nationalist attitude of the Labour Party.¹

In the United States the Communist Party protested against the raising of the arms embargo on the democracies which were at war, and against lease-lend. On 22nd May, 1940, while the battle was raging in Flanders, it organised a meeting in New York against Roosevelt's policy.⁸ And again, in the spring of 1941 when General Sikorski and M. Mikolajczyk were in Washington to

¹ In the summing up in the libel action brought by Sir Walter Citrine and other Trade Union leaders in May, 1940, against the *Daily Worker*, it was stated that its campaign " was the reflection of a policy dictated by Moscow* which aimed " at breaking Great Britain's resistance to Germany's attacks." (*Times*, 7th May.)

² L. Fischer, *The Great Challenge*, London, Cape, 1947, p. 14. See also the extracts from the New York *Daily Worker*, official organ of the American Communist Party, given in William C. Bullitt's *The Great Globe Itself*, London, Macmillan, 1947, pp. 195-253.

seek aid for the Polish liberation army from the American Government, they were denounced by the Communist Press as " *agents of British imperialism who were trying to drag the United States into war*"¹

In Belgium the parliamentary Communist Party at the beginning of October, 1939, denounced " the urgent appeals of the British Government, which aimed at involving Belgium in the war " and called on the Belgian Government to line up with the U.S.S.R. to " restore peace." It went as far as congratulating Degrelle's " Rexists " for opposing any kind of concession to the French and British.²

The fact that a country had been occupied by Germany did not cause any radical change in Communist tactics. In Czechoslovakia the Communists put " Hacha's followers and the supporters of Benes " on the same footing—after the German-Soviet pact—and accused the latter of being the lackeys of French and British capitalism. In February, 1940, M. Hubert Ripka, a member of the Czech National Committee in London, denounced the Communist campaign in the Committee's publication *Cesloslovensky Boj* as being directed primarily against the independent resistance movements, and thus helping Hitler to maintain his grip on their country.³ Both the facts established by

¹ S. Mikolajczyk, *Le Martyre de la Pologne*, in *Le Monde*, 19th February, 1948.

² *Le Monde* (Communist paper published in Brussels), No. 4, 7th October, 1939, pp. 18-19.

³ This article was reprinted in *La Croix*, 21st February, 1940. After the liberation M. Hubert Ripka, the author of a remarkable book on Munich, of which he was an uncompromising opponent, was Minister of Commerce in the Czechoslovak Government until the crisis in February, 1948. The end of his article of February, 1940, is not without interest today: " We are not fighting to

M. Ripka and his analysis of the situation have recently been confirmed by President Beneš, who in his memoirs summed up the Czech Communists' position at this period, after an interview he had in Paris with J. Sverma, a Communist deputy from Prague, in October, 1939 : " This interview gave me a clearer understanding of the extent to which our Communists, under the influence of their Soviet brothers, differed from me in their attitude to the war. We were both convinced that the U.S.S.R. would have to fight. But the Communists reckoned that their entry into the war could be postponed until the end of hostilities, when both sides would be too exhausted to prevent a social revolution or to keep it under control . . . And so I was not surprised when I heard from Prague that our resistance movement was being cold-shouldered by the Communists. The decisions of the Central Committee of the Party published in the underground Communist newspaper were reported to us by our friends in Prague. The Communists were counting on the Soviet remaining neutral until the end of the * imperialist war,' after which the world revolution could begin."¹

change the Nazi dictatorship of violence into a Communist dictatorship of violence. Our struggle is for the freedom of the whole nation, that is, for the freedom of all and the rights of each one of us."

¹ *Gazette de Lausanne*, 14th March, 1948. As a matter of interest, and without being able to guarantee its accuracy, we reprint below a Havas dispatch of 20th February, 1940: "The Communist groups in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia which remained faithful to Stalin after the German-Soviet agreement are very active, apparently with German support. Smerald and Gottwald, the Communist leaders who fled to Moscow after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, went through Bohemia on a journey of inspection in December and January, with the approval of the German leaders. It so happens that in places like Moravska, Ostrava, Kladno and Pilsen, which are known to be centres where **the workers were**

The Part Played by the French Communist Party

It was in France, however, that the Communists made the most intensive and systematic efforts to spread defeatism. The French Communist Party wavered for a few days, torn between orders from Moscow and sheer inertia at having to leave positions which it had defended from 1935 right up to the eve of the German-Soviet pact. Under the influence of Gabriel Peri¹ the Communist Parliamentary Party voted for the military credits at the sitting on 2nd September, 1939, but it soon toed the "line." The turning point came at the beginning of October when Florimond Bonte and Arthur Ramette sent their letter from the "Workers and Peasants Group" to President Herriot. This was an incident of outstanding importance in Hitler's peace campaign.² It was for this reason that the first number of the French underground paper *Cahiers du bolchevisme*,³ after denouncing the "gross error" of the parliamentary party in voting for the war credits and pointing out its "opportunistic" and "legalistic" tendencies and

formerly very sympathetic to Communism, only 10, 20, and 60 people attended their meetings . . . In the leaflets which they distribute, the Stalinists assert that National-Socialism is the creed nearest to State Socialism . . . The alliance with Germany is explained by the argument that revolution is easier in a Reich which has already passed through the capitalist stage . . . The German authorities not only tolerate their propaganda but encourage it, since in these tracts the Communists attack M M. Daladier and Chamberlain, 'the instigators of capitalist war,' and 'their lackey Edward Benès.'"

¹ For Peri's views at this period, see Jean Zay, *Souvenirs et Solitudes*, Paris, R. Julliard, 1945, pp. 201-3.

² See pp. 79-83.

³ Seventeenth year, second half-year, 1939—January, 1940. This number was circulated in a faked wrapper bearing the title *The Defence of Freedom*.

the vacillations of the Central Committee itself,¹ could finally hail the letter to Herriot as lining up "the Party, publicly and dramatically, against the war"

From then right up to the end they were to follow the "party line," as laid down in October in an article by George Dimitrov,² the secretary of the Communist International, and by two further documents in particular which developed its main theme: Maurice Thorez' interview with the correspondent of the British Communist paper, the *Daily Worker* (3rd November, 1939); and Andre Marty's *Open Letter to M. Lion Blum*. In his interview the secretary of the French Communist Party explained that if he had deserted, it was because he wished "to remain at his post in the class war which the people had to fight against the war-mongers, the fascists and the capitalist exploiters." The Communist journalist was a little disturbed by this attitude. If it became general, who would be left in France or at the front to fight against the war? Thorez reassured him. If he himself had deserted, it was because "the leadership of the party had to be secured against any eventuality," but the vast majority of militant Communists would carry on with their jobs where they were, since their work "lay among the soldiers in the army, the workers in the factories, the peasants in the villages, the refugees in the

¹ "The Central Committee did not understand in time the significance of the changes which suddenly occurred at the end of August and at the outbreak of war. When, in the international field, Hitler either willingly or unwillingly dropped the idea of a war against the Soviet Union, the aggressors in Paris and London embarked on an armed conflict with Germany. There can, therefore, be no question of a Peace Front, or of collective security, or of mutual assistance." *Cahiers du bolchevisme*, p. 11.

² This article, entitled *War and the Working Class in the Capitalist Countries*, was widely circulated in France in a pamphlet bearing the faked title: *The Truth about the War: How is it to be won?*

evacuation centres, the wives of the men who had been called everywhere."¹

They did, in fact, carry on with their work, both in the country and at the front. In the country the leading Communists began a campaign for "immediate peace" and did their utmost to stir up an anti-war movement among the people, making use of every possible means, legal, in so far as action of this kind was possible, and illegal. Through, for instance, the declaration which Florimond Bonte was about to read out just before he was expelled from the *Chambre des Deputes*. It was, however, printed by the Party press. It castigated the "Anglo-French imperialists" who were responsible for the war because they "*had persuaded Poland to refuse an amicable settlement of the Danzig question*" and the French deputies who, instead of examining Hitler's peace offer, had permitted "*a war policy to be acclaimed and adopted which was contrary to the interests of the French people and which the French people was determined to bring to an end*"² Or, again in the *Chambre des Deputes*, the demonstration against the French Army by the four Communist deputies (Raymond Guyot, Fernand Grenier, Charles Michels and Andre Mercier) during the sitting on 9th January, 1940. Or the appeal addressed by Maurice Thorez and Jacques Duclos *To the members of the French Communist Party*, in which they lauded the party whose "fighting slogans for peace and against the imperialist war were finding their way into every section of the working class, in the factories, in the countryside and

¹ Thorez' interview was published in one of the clandestine numbers of *Humanite* and in the *Cahiers du bolchevisme* already mentioned. Its title in this review was "Maurice Thorez speaks . . . Statement on the struggle against the imperialist war."

² Clandestine number of *Humanite* printed in December, 1939.

as far as the trenches" Or the declarations of the Communist deputies and their lawyers during their trial in March and April, 1940. The case was brought up before the Third Military Tribunal of Paris. It had been decided to hold it in camera, but the widest possible publicity was given to their statements by the Communist Party. At the hearing on 3rd April M. Francois Billoux read a statement on behalf of all the accused : " We are being persecuted," it ran, " because we have resisted, and with all our strength continue to resist the imperialist war now raging over our country ; and because we call on the people to demand that it shall be brought to an end by peace" The March-April number of the *Internationale Communiste* review for 1940 was devoted to this trial and contained an article in which Maurice Thorez explained that the Communist deputies were being prosecuted for being members " of the party which is organising the struggle against the imperialist war" Or again, newspapers written specially for the troops at the front were started between January and the end of June, 1940, in which they were urged " to end the war as quickly as possible," to act together " to put an end to the slaughter," and " to fraternise " with the German soldiers.¹ In February, 1940, when there was a general demand for a more vigorous conduct of the war, the French Communist Party circulated a *Letter to the French Troops* in which the front-line soldiers were addressed as follows : "We must, dear friends, all act together to stay the hand of the butchers who are planning murderous offensives " ; they must unite to bring down the Government; and they must "force it to make peace " and thus prevent the " coming massacres"

¹ *Le Trait d' Union, La Liaison, L'Humanite du Soldat.*

Such conduct earned praise for the French Communists in the Soviet Press, which encouraged them to carry on the good work. An article in *Pravda* on **4th** December, 1939, expressed satisfaction because in France "*large numbers of leaflets demanding peace have been distributed since the outbreak of war*" In spite of "*the severest counter-measures taken by the authorities, the distribution of leaflets demanding an end to the war is increasing rather than decreasing*" On the following day it explained that *Humanite* had been banned because it "told the people the truth about the U.S.S.R.'s peace policy and about the criminal policy of the war-mongers." A few weeks later, on 26th January, 1940, *Pravda* also praised the French Communist Party's defeatism: "In spite of all the reprisals," it wrote, "the illegal Communist Party tirelessly continues its underground struggle in France against the war-mongers. The party newspaper *Humanite*, anti-militarist leaflets, etc., are distributed in the factories with good results . . . The dark forces of reaction will not prevent *the spread of an anti-militarist attitude in the country* and of a hatred for the oppressors of the French people . . . The Minister of the Interior, Sarraut, has been forced to acknowledge, in one of his reports, the ineffectiveness of all the measures he has taken. *The anti-militarist movement in France is spreading in spite of reprisals*"

Such propaganda, carried on through a great variety of channels, undermined the morale of the French troops to an extent which helped **the Wehrmacht when** it delivered its onslaught. This is confirmed by **a mass** of evidence, from which it is enough to select that of a violently anti-Nazi American journalist, Mr. William Shirer, who crossed the **whole war zone on his way from**

Berlin to Paris half-way through June, 1940 : " From German and French sources alike I heard many stories of how the Communists had received their orders from their party not to fight, and didn't . . ." In his opinion " among large masses of the troops Communist propaganda had won the day."¹

During the " phoney war " the French Communist Party for the most part collaborated only indirectly with Hitler, mainly because of the political position it had adopted. This was exploited by German propaganda in many different ways. For example, German aircraft scattered thousands of leaflets over France containing Molotov's speech of 31st August, 1939, to the Supreme Soviet. But there were also instances of direct collaboration, as is proved by Ribbentrop's remark to Mussolini during their conversation in Rome on 10th March, 1940. When Mussolini expressed astonishment that Communist papers should still be published in France in spite of being banned, the Reich Foreign Minister informed him, with a smile, " *that some of these papers were printed in Germany*"² It is not surprising, therefore, that on the day the Germans entered Paris the French Communist leaders should have ventured to ask permission to publish *Humanité* and other party newspapers legally, undertaking to " *denounce the activities*

¹ William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-41*, London, Hamish Hamilton, pp. 342 and 343. This is certainly an overstatement. Mr. Shirer was able to ascertain that " the French here and there fought valiantly and even stubbornly." While taking into due account the effect which Communist agitation undoubtedly had, it must also be said that it could have been neutralised if the policy of the French Government and the attitude of certain powerful circles had not made its task easier and helped to spread its effects.

² *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 348.

of British agents " and to " defend the conclusion of a Franco-Soviet pact of friendship which would be complementary to the German-Soviet pact" ¹

Russia's Economic Aid to Germany

Germany's first advantage from the agreement with Russia was military : she could fight on a single front. ² Her second was economic : she could escape the consequences of the blockade.

In Hitler's survey of the situation on 22nd August, 1939, he congratulated himself on now being able to count on Russian raw materials for certain. ³ Nor was he disappointed. He mentioned this in a conversation with Neville Henderson on 25th August. ⁴ And Goering in his talk to the workmen at the Börsig-Werke on 6th September laid special emphasis on the importance of the economic agreement with Russia for the victorious conduct of the war. Berlin was not worried when, on about 11th October, Moscow came to an agreement with London for exchanging timber for rubber and zinc. In fact Germany hoped to profit by the exchange, for the rubber and zinc which she could thus obtain from Russia were " as important for her as Russia's timber was for Britain." The timber was, moreover, sent from Murmansk in British or neutral ships which the German Navy could intercept *en route*. There was no need to fear complications as Russia " had no desire to damage Germany's war economy." ⁵

¹ See on this subject: A. Rossi, *Physiologie du Parti Communiste*, Paris, Editions Self, 1948, especially pp. 402-10.

² See p. 90 *et seq.*

³ N.C.A., III, p. 585 : " We need no longer fear the blockade."

⁴ See pp. 46-7.

⁵ N.C.A., VI, p. 979.

Hitler was absolutely "certain of Russia's economic co-operation" and praised it to Sven Hedin.¹ The Chief of Naval Operations was also very optimistic. "*The importance for us of Russia's economic aid*" he said, "is decisive. *Their offer was so generous that the economic blockade is almost bound to fail*"² In February, 1940, Schnurre recalled that "Stalin himself had promised generous help" to Germany's economic programme.³ As he wanted deliveries of German armaments quickly, Stalin spoke about the future in the most glowing terms to Karl von Ritter: "If we—Russia and Germany—go on collaborating like this for another four or five years, Russia will be able to produce enough raw materials to supply two Germanys."⁴

Even before the formal signature on 10th February, 1940, of the comprehensive economic agreement outlined in the correspondence between Molotov and Ribbentrop on 29th September, 1939,⁵ the commodities and raw materials supplied to Germany reached an impressive figure. Under the new agreement the total of Soviet deliveries and services during the first twelve months was to amount to 800 million Reichsmarks. The most important Russian deliveries were to be 900,000 tons of mineral oil,⁶ 100,000 tons of cotton, 500,000 tons of iron ore, 300,000 tons of scrap iron,

¹ Interview given by Sven Hedin to the correspondent of the *News Chronicle* in Stockholm, 22nd October, 1939.

² N.C.A., VI, p. 979 (26th October, 1939).

³ N.-S.R., p. 133.

⁴ D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, p. 16 of the off-print.

⁵ See pp. 70-1.

⁶ To this total must be added the petroleum from the Drohobycz and Borislav districts which Russia had undertaken to deliver separately, in accordance with the agreement of 28th September, 1939. See p. 69 and cf. N.-S.R., p. 109.

2,400 kg. of platinum, and manganese, timber, fodder, oil-seeds, etc.¹ Negotiations were difficult and protracted. But " *the desire of the Soviet Government to help Germany and to consolidate firmly the political understanding in economic matters* became more and more evident." If Germany could meet her commitments to the extent required, the arrival of the Soviet raw materials would " *decisively weaken the effects of the English blockade*"² In March, 1940, Ribbentrop passed on the following information to the Rumanian Foreign Minister, M. Gafencu : " The economic assistance which the Soviets could give to Germany was considerable. It might well be decisive. The economic agreement had been worked out to the last detail and was being implemented with the strictest punctuality by the Soviets, who wished to live down their undeserved reputation for vagueness and inefficiency. And through this economic collaboration Russia was being drawn even closer to the national and social order ruling in the Third Reich."² The Soviets felt the same about it. An article on the agreement in *Pravda* drew attention to its " *considerable political importance* " and added that " all the agreements reached between Germany and the U.S.S.R. during the last three months—the non-aggression pact, the boundary and friendship treaty, and lastly the economic agreement—have established a solid and lasting basis for the development of cordial economic and political relations between the two states. *They fully correspond to the basic interests of the German and Soviet peoples, to the interests of peace, and to the interests of the popular masses in every coun*

¹ Schnurre's report of 26th February, 1940 ; N.S.R., pp. 131 -3

² N.-S.R., p. 134.

³ G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 38.

⁴ February 18th, 1940,

The agreements carried one condition which was the source of a good deal of friction. Although the Russian raw materials were to be delivered at a faster rate than Germany's industrial goods, the balance between the two countries was periodically to be adjusted. But Germany was a country at war, and the whole of her industry had to be mobilised for armaments production. Consequently her industrial goods, which were her part of the bargain, were not always delivered regularly,^x and in March, 1940, the Soviet Government had apparently to remind Germany of her obligations under the agreements.² Without ever giving cause for alarm, this resulted in serious differences, especially at the beginning of September, 1940.⁸ In his report of the 28th, Schnurre considered the balance sheet for the agreements to be very much in Germany's favour, since in one year Soviet deliveries to Germany in grain alone amounted to about 1 million tons.⁴ Again in September Stahmer, the German Ambassador in Tokio, informed the Japanese Government that the German-Soviet agreement had worked out "remarkably well" and that it had been "faithfully carried out by Russia, right up to the delivery of the last drop of oil."⁶ And Funck, the minister, confirmed at Nuremberg that "the Russians

¹ Walter Funck, former Reich Minister for Economic Affairs, gave the following explanation of this at Nuremberg: "Our deliveries of machinery were always late, the Russian orders being for the most part for specialised machines." *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., XIII, p. 114.

² N.C.A., IV, p. 1082.

² N.-S.R., pp. 196-7, 199-201.

⁴ N.-S.R., p. 200.

⁵ Interview with Prince Konoe, *Combat*, 14th September, 1945.

punctually furnished us with grain, manganese, and oil."¹

It was not possible to draw up a balance sheet solely on the basis of the deliveries of Russian goods and raw materials. Moscow also played the part of a more or less honest broker in procuring products from other countries for Germany. Ribbentrop confessed as much to Mussolini on 10th March, 1940. "In confidence, the Reich Foreign Minister can announce that Russia is being very generous in supplying raw materials and is *using some of her own gold to buy raw materials which Germany needs*."² In doing this Russia was fulfilling a promise made at the time of the agreement: "the Soviet Union declared her willingness to *buy metals and raw materials in third countries*."³

It is understandable, therefore, why London, which wanted a large-scale commercial agreement with the U.S.S.R., mainly for political reasons, also wished to be assured that British goods exported to Russia would not go through to Germany by this route. The Soviet leaders stubbornly refused to give any such guarantee. They would not agree to having any "strings" attached,⁴ and Stalin himself informed Berlin that he had left Sir Stafford Cripps under no illusions on this point—as on several others.⁵ The fact that Moscow **and** Berlin were hand in glove over this was a source of continual worry to the British leaders. Mr. **Hugh Dalton**, Minister of Economic Warfare in Churchill's

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc.*, XIII, p. 114.

² *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 347.

³ Memorandum by Schnurre, 26th February, 1940 ; N.-S.R., P. 133.

⁴ N.C.A., V I, p. 983 (1st May, 1940).

⁵ N.-S.R., p. 167 (13th July, 1940).

Cabinet, told the House of Commons on 28th January, 1941, that important talks were being held in Washington on the question of American exports to Russia. His ministry had numerous proofs showing that Russia was exporting goods to Germany and replacing them by American imports. For example, Russian imports of cotton had been insignificant in the past but during the previous quarter had reached 30,000 tons, while at the same time considerable supplies of cotton were being sent from Russia to Germany. On the same day the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax, discussed this question with Mr. Sumner Welles.

A still more serious gap in the British blockade of war-time Germany was caused as a result of the secret agreement of 28th September, 1939, by which Russia allowed Germany the use of her territory and railways for the transport of goods imported from Rumania, Iran, Afghanistan and the Far East.¹ This clause appeared in the economic agreement of 11th February, 1940, and thus gave Germany "*a door wide open to the East*"² A large quantity of imports came across Russia from Manchukuo.³ And when he drew up a balance sheet of the benefits accruing to Germany from these agreements, Schnurre emphasised that they should be maintained at all costs since "*our sole economic connection with Iran, Afghanistan, Manchukuo, Japan and, also, with South America, is the route across Russia, which is being used to an increasing extent for German raw material imports.*"⁴

¹ See p. 71.

² N.-S.R., p. 134.

³ Ciano's *Diplomatic Papers*, p. 347.

⁴ N.-S.R., p. 201 (September, 1940).

CHAPTER VII

The Clouds Gather

NOT long after the victory over Poland and the failure of his peace proposals, Hitler began to prepare for war in the West. The plan drawn up by his General Staff was in his hands by about the end of October, 1939, and he made one alteration in it at General von Manstein's suggestion¹ which was to be of decisive importance for the success of the attack. The main thrust was to be made through the Ardennes against Sedan and the Meuse.

Operations were timed to start about half-way through November but were held up by bad weather and were eventually postponed until the spring. The offensive was launched on 10th May, 1940. Six weeks later the Franco-German armistice was signed near Compiegne.

Search For a Compromise With Britain

At the triumphant conclusion of this campaign Hitler still possessed a large army whose losses had been trifling ; and, in addition, his loot from the victory and the armistice was enormous.

What was he to do with this vast array of men and steel ? It was still almost intact, and he could direct its impetus in any direction he chose.

¹B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, London, Cawell, 1948, pp. 71 and 119-30.

Hitler was still obsessed with the idea *of bringing the war to a speedy conclusion through a compromise with Britain.*

Britain had refused to listen to him in 1939, in spite of the German-Soviet pact of 23rd August and the defeat of Poland in September, but she might be more reasonable now that France was defeated and that, in Europe, Germany controlled the coasts of the North Sea, the Channel and the Atlantic. On 19th July, 1940, Hitler addressed the Reichstag in the rôle of a conqueror—but a conqueror who was ready to break off the fight and negotiate. In his speech he praised German-Soviet collaboration and warned Britain against entertaining any illusion that she might be able to undermine it.

To force Britain to capitulate, he had to prove that she had lost the battle on the Continent once and for all, and at the same time avoid rousing her too much. This was why he did not occupy the whole of France or send his divisions across Spain to Gibraltar and Morocco.

In June, 1940, this operation seemed easy. Hitler could count on the assent and even the active co-operation of Franco, who had offered Hitler his services at the beginning of the month, and ten days or so later had helped himself to something on account by occupying Tangier.¹ In a note written on 8th August, Stohrer, the German Ambassador in Madrid, **reminded Berlin** that "according to a memorandum from the Spanish Embassy last **June**, the Spanish **Government declares** its readiness, under certain conditions, **to abandon its non-belligerent status and to enter the war on the side of Germany and Italy.**"²

¹ On 14th June, 1940.

² This note is the first document in *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, published by the U.S. Department of State in 1946.

But if the Wehrmacht crossed the Pyrenees and so threatened North Africa, the war would enter a new phase involving a struggle to destroy the British Empire ; and this would deprive Hitler of the trump card on which he was counting to bring Britain to terms. In the talks at the end of August, 1939, he had suggested that Britain should exchange Poland for the security of the British Empire, which he said he would " guarantee.' ' This idea, which was to be raised again by Rudolf Hess during his escapade in May, 1941, explains Hitler's attitude and even his reaction to Italy's claims. During his meetings in Munich with Mussolini on 18th and 19th June, 1940, when he was arranging the armistice terms for France, Hitler stated that he did not think it was advisable to destroy the British Empire as he considered it "*an important factor in world stability.*" The truth was that he wanted to make peace on the basis of his enormous gains from the Polish and Flanders campaigns. If he gave in to the greed of Franco and Mussolini, the war would have to be prolonged so that they could share out between them the spoils of the British and French Empires in Africa. As Ribbentrop told Ciano at the time, if Britain did not capitulate "*it would be total war, complete, pitiless.*"¹ But as long as there was a chance of reaching a settlement with her, Hitler preferred to make the attempt, even at the risk of offending his friends in Rome and Madrid who, after all, wanted to get something out of a victory to which they had contributed very little.

And so Hitler stopped and examined the sky-line in the direction of London. He stayed **where he was for** the moment, the more willingly as his General Staff

¹ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43, p. 266.*

was advising caution.¹ For the moment, he did Not insist. In December, 1940, when he wished to revive the scheme he had shelved in June and July, it was too late. Marshal Keitel, Chief of the General Staff, considered this " blunder " of Hitler's to be one of the main causes of Germany's defeat. " *History would have been different*" he said at the Nuremberg trial, " *if we had taken Gibraltar and if the Fuehrer had not let France keep her Navy, her colonial troops and her colonies.*"^a

After the Battle of France

So overwhelming a victory over France could not but have had serious repercussions on German-Soviet relations.

Molotov had been careful to take his precautions, just as he had at the time of the German campaign in Norway. When von Schulenburg announced that the Flanders offensive had begun, he answered " *that he understood that Germany had to protect herself against Anglo-French attack*" and added that he " *had no doubt of Germany's success.*"² On 16th May *Izvestia* and *Pravda* devoted two almost identical articles to the German offensive. *Pravda* was a little more outspoken and justified the offensive first of all on the grounds that the Anglo-French intended to make " Holland and Belgium into a military base from which to attack Germany's vital centres." Germany had merely forestalled them, as in Norway. After again quoting Stalin's phrase about the imperialists who " like to pull the chestnuts out of the

¹ Sec General Jodl's note of 30th June, 1940, *N.C.A.*, Supplement A, p. 404-6.

² R. Cartier, *Les secrets de la guerre*, etc., p. 180.

³ *N.-S.R.*, p. 142.

fire with other people's fingers," *Pravda* wound up :
 " We now see how great a responsibility for rejecting Germany
 peace proposals and for starting a new imperialist war in
 Europe rests on the shoulders of the Anglo-French imperialists

When the Wehrmacht had won its victory Molotov summoned von Schulenburg to his office on the evening of 18th June, 1940, and expressed " the warmest congratulations of the Soviet Government on the splendid success of the German Armed Forces "¹ At the same time, he informed Schulenburg of Russia's activities in the Baltic states, and of the fact that Dekanosov² had been sent to Lithuania, Vyshinsky³ to Latvia, and Zhdanov⁴ to Estonia to " break in " both the Governments of these three countries and the countries themselves. No objection was raised by the German Government. But Berlin was not to be allowed to think that it was quits through this exchange of courtesies, so in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31st July, 1940, Molotov went out of his way to remind Germany that the pact of August, 1939, had given, and was still giving her " the assurance of tranquillity in the East " and that Berlin should not forget that the " magnificent success " of the German Army was something else which it owed to Russia. Molotov again reminded Hitler of this during his conversation with him in Berlin on 13th November, 1940: " The German-Russian agreement had not been without influence upon the great German victories. " *

¹ N.-S.R., p. 154.

² Commissar attached to the Foreign Ministry, appointed Soviet Ambassador to Berlin in November, 1940.

³ At present U.S.S.R. representative at U.N.O.

⁴ Head of the Bolshevik party organisation in Leningrad and secretary of the Bolshevik party ; later became chief of the Cominform.

⁵ Seepp. 93-4.

This assistance was undoubtedly the vital guarantee which Stalin had offered Hitler in August, 1939, and which had made their collaboration possible. But since the end of June its value had depreciated, for by then the Western Front had ceased to exist and Hitler had less need to cover himself in the East. Moreover, Germany's relative strength had been increased by the collapse of the French Army and the capture of new strategic bases and economic resources. In short, Hitler considered he needed Stalin much less at the end of June, 1940, than he did in August, 1939, or May, 1940, and this gave him considerably more freedom of action.

All the capitals were buzzing with rumours of German and Russian troop concentrations on the new eastern frontiers. Hitler affected not to be in the least perturbed by them, both publicly in a speech on 19th July and privately at a meeting shortly afterwards : "*Although Russia," he declared, "looks on at our great successes with tears in her eyes, she has no intention of joining in the war against Germany"*¹

But if it is true that a few weeks later General Jodl was ordered to prepare a "counter-concentration of troops" on the eastern frontier,² Berlin must have had some qualms. The Nuremberg documents prove that the idea of "settling accounts" with Russia had already occurred to Hitler during the French campaign. He mentioned it at the time to General Jodl³ and explained what he had in mind to his General Staff (Keitel, Jodl and Warlimont) during a conference at the Berghof on

¹ R. Cartier, *Les secrets de la guerre*, etc., p. 232.

² H. C. Deutsch, *Quand Hitler et Staline se partageaient le monde in La Bataille*, 30th April, 1947.

³ N.C.A., VII, p. 926, point 12.

29th July, 1940.¹ The three generals persuaded him to abandon the scheme for attacking Russia as early as the following autumn on the grounds that they were completely unprepared,² but at the beginning of August the first directives were issued for the preparation of an offensive timed for the spring of 1941.³ Half-way through August Goering told General Thomas, head of the Economics and Armaments branch of the High Command, that deliveries to Russia should be made punctually up to the spring of 1941, but not after that date.⁴ The transfer of troops to the East began at the end of the same month.⁶

There is no doubt that both Germany and Italy were a little disturbed by Russia's entry into Bessarabia at the beginning of July, 1940, and afraid that she would push on to the south-west as far as the Dardanelles. •

The Russians for their part not only virulently denied the reports appearing in the Anglo-Saxon press of troop concentrations on the Lithuanian-German frontier but even declared, through Molotov's own lips (in his speech of 31st July) that "*the prospect of an increase in German power*" did not worry the Soviet leaders in the least since "*the friendly relations between Germany and the U.S.S.R.*"

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, VII, p. 249, deposition by Warlimont; XV, pp. 390-1, deposition by Jodl.

² R. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, pp. 17-18 of the off-print; *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., VII, p. 24Q.

³ Affidavit by Warlimont, N.C.A., V, p. 740 and *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, VII, 250; affidavit by Koestring, N.C.A., V, p. 734; deposition by Jodl, *Trial*, XV, pp. 390-1.

⁴ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, III, p. 331 and N.C.A., IV, p. 1082.

⁵ O.K.W. directive of 27th August; N.C.A., VI, p. 987.

⁶ See below p. 136.

were based on the fundamental interests of both countries"

All the same, the fact is that between June and August, 1940, immediately after the Germans had won their victory in the West, Stalin hastened to cash the securities which he had been promised in the secret protocols of August and September, 1939. The fate of the three Baltic countries and Bessarabia was sealed when these protocols were signed. On the evening of 28th September, 1939, just after the new agreement had been accepted but not signed, the Russians made use of a short break in the meeting—while Ribbentrop went to the Grand Theatre to have a look at the ballet—to meet a delegation from Estonia and speed up the Baltic settlement. The U.S.S.R. concluded these so-called pacts of " mutual assistance " with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania between 23rd September and 10th October, 1939, and they were the beginning of what was to become the military occupation of these countries. The political pressure which thenceforth the U.S.S.R. brought to bear on them eventually transformed them into Soviet Republics, and as such they were incorporated into the U.S.S.R. The objectives of Soviet policy had to be attained *at all costs*. But the state of mind of the Soviet leaders is shown by the fact that the Baltic countries were entirely occupied between 15th and 17th June, 1940, just when France collapsed, and that Bessarabia was occupied two weeks later.

A further indication of their concern at **the way things were** developing during this period was that in July a decree was promulgated increasing the working **day** from seven to eight **hours** and forcing **the workers** to **stay at** their jobs in **the** factories, with **very severe penalties if they left without permission**. Molotov gave

the reason for these measures in his speech on the 31st. "The U.S.S.R.," he said, "must show the greatest vigilance " and must produce enough " to reinforce all its positions at home and abroad." According to Walter Duranty, it was in fact the " wholesale mobilisation of Russia's industrial and agricultural manpower," in a situation which had become dangerous.¹

These precautions did not mean that the Soviet leaders were preparing to throw Germany over. Believing as they did in a German victory,² they wanted to stay on the right side of the fence. Britain's advances were rudely repulsed. Actually, on about 10th July, 1940, Sir Stafford Cripps approached Stalin with a very important proposal. The new British Ambassador tried to convince the master of the Kremlin that Germany was striving for the complete domination of Europe, and that she was a danger "*for the Soviet Union as well as Britain* " ; the two countries should therefore "*agree on a common policy of self-protection against Germany*" Cripps added that in exchange for this Britain was ready to recognise Russia's rights in the Dardanelles and her leading role in the Balkans. To this Stalin turned a deaf ear. He said he knew Germany and the German leaders and did not believe there was any desire on their part to control all Europe, nor did he think that "*German military successes menaced the Soviet Union and her friendly relations with Germany*" The German-Soviet agreement was based " on the basic interests of both countries." He even instructed Molotov to give the memorandum of his conversation with Cripps to

¹ Walter Duranty, *U.S.S.R.: The Story of Soviet Russia*, Hamish Hamilton, London, p. 258.

² See the interview between Molotov and Rotso on 25th June, in the next chapter.

von Schulenburg so that it could be sent on to Berlin. It went on 13th July.¹ This willingness to prove his loyalty to a victorious Germany was part of the lightning conductor system which Stalin was installing.

The Frontal Assault on Britain

On 16th July, 1940, Hitler issued orders to Generals Keitel and Jodl for the invasion of Britain. " *Since England*" they ran, " *despite the hopelessness of her military situation, has so far shown no signs of willingness to come to terms, I have decided to prepare landing operations against her and if necessary to carry them out.*"² He announced this decision to Mussolini in a long letter he wrote the same day. On the previous day he had approached the French Government with a request for its support " in effectively carrying on the fight against England " and had demanded that eight airfields in Morocco be placed at his disposal, with the Mediterranean ports and the shipping necessary to supply the German forces stationed there.³ On the 19th, in a speech to the Reichstag, he made one last appeal to Britain, who did not budge.

The operation was planned for mid-August. On 1st August the first clash occurred in the skies over

itf.-S.R., pp. 166-8.

² Speech by Sir Hartley Shawcross, Counsel for the Prosecution, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., vol. I II, p. 139.

³ The Vichy Government rejected the German demands. See on this subject: H. Dumoulin de la Barthete, *Le Temps des Illusions*, Geneva, Au Cheval Aile, 1946, p. 206 ; *Proces du Marechal Petain*, official edition, Paris, 1945, pp. 86, 138, and 172 ; *La Delegation frangaise auprte de la Commission allemande d'armistice*, a collection of documents published by the French Government, vol. I, Paris, 1947, Appendix I V, pp. 462-5. This includes General StuelpnagePs letter transmitting the demands " of the Fuehrer of the German Reich and Commander-in-Chief of the Army."

England. In the latter part of the month the invasion forces, grouped into three armies under Marshal von Reichenau, General Strauss and General Busch, reached their assembly points from Cherbourg to Holland.

These troops were never to cross the Channel. To do so they would have had to command it, and to command it they would first of all have had to destroy British air power. What happened is well known. The R.A.F. inflicted such losses on Goering's aircraft that the Luftwaffe had first to give up heavy day bombing and then, towards the end of September, to throw in its hand altogether. There was no longer any hope of obtaining air supremacy soon enough to be of any use, since, for meteorological reasons, the invasion should have been attempted " at the beginning of October at the latest."¹

In the strategy of the Axis the invasion of Britain was to coincide with an Italian offensive against the British forces in Egypt. On 19th August Mussolini sent a telegram to General Graziani ordering him to attack in Egypt " *as soon as the first German patrol lands in England*"² As this did not happen as quickly as they expected, the Duce, who was fuming with impatience, forced a very reluctant Graziani to attack all the same. The offensive began on 14th September but did not get beyond Sidi Barrani. General Wavell's first real line of defence was enough to halt it.

Cause and Consequence of a Decisive Defeat

When exactly did Hitler realise that the invasion could not be carried out ? At his meeting with Ciano in

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc., XIV, p. 115, deposition by Raeder.*

² *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43, p. 285.*

Salzburg on 28th August, 1940, he blamed the weather for the failure of the attack : " I need at least two weeks of fine weather to neutralise British naval superiority with my Air Force."¹ But the bad weather did not stop the heavy bombing of London and the English ports and towns, nor daily and almost hourly battles between the two air forces, and it was in these air battles that the Luftwaffe was defeated. On 15th August, 76 German aircraft were shot down for a loss of 32 British defending aircraft ; on 18th August, 71 against 27 ; on 15th September, 56 against 28. Between 1st August and 5th October the Luftwaffe lost 1,188 machines and the R.A.F. 675.²

A note from Raeder to Admiral Aussman shows that towards the end of August Hitler was beginning to fear that " *air superiority over the Channel could not be achieved during the autumn of 1940*"³ and in September he gave the impression of being no longer much interested in the invasion.⁴ This was because, as we have just seen, the conditions which would have made it possible had not been achieved. A few weeks later Hitler admitted that " *the air attacks on England*" had not given " *the anticipated results either on land or on the convoys.*"⁵ The gamble was too dangerous to risk a defeat. Hitler explained to the Italian Ambassador, Alfieri : " It is as if I were

¹ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-41*, p. 286.

² These are the revised figures issued by the Air Ministry and based on information from German sources which became available after the end of the war. German losses in manpower were much heavier than those of the R.A.F. since the German aircraft were mostly bombers carrying crews of about five.

³ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., I II, p. 141.

⁴ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X I V, p. 115, deposition by Raeder.

⁵ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1940* (14th November), pp. 120-1.

pointing at England a revolver containing only one bullet: if I had the misfortune to miss, the consequences would be disastrous and I would be much worse off than before."¹

The last word on the question was said by General Jodl at a talk he gave to the Nazi chiefs on 7th November, 1943, when he bluntly explained the reasons for this severe defeat. "*The invasion of England was prepared down to the last detail, but as all our means of transport were improvised it was too risky because we did not succeed in decisively knocking out the British air arm.*"¹

It was the R.A.F. therefore which got the whip-hand and upset Hitler's plans in the autumn of 1940. It was the R.A.F. and the British people, under Churchill's leadership, who *prevented a German victory*.

This is not to underestimate the importance of other battles in which mortal blows were inflicted on the German armed forces, such as the defence of Moscow in November, 1941, the tremendous revenge of the Soviet Army at Stalingrad, and the annihilation of Rommel's *Afrika Korps* in the spring of 1943.

But even if the Wehrmacht had been able to reach its objective, the Archangel-Astrakhan line, and if European Russia had been knocked out of the conflict, the war would have gone on and would very probably have been won by Britain and the United States. Won much later, but won all the same.

But if, instead of proclaiming that the British **people** would fight "*on the beaches, in the fields and in the streets*"² or that the British had "*become the sole champions now in arms to defend the world cause*" and would carry on **the**

¹ Dino Alfieri, *Due dittatori di fronte*, Milan, Rizzoli, p. 101.

² N.C.A., V n, p. 927.

³ Speech in the House of Commons, 4th June, 1940.

struggle " *until the curse of Hitler is lifted from the brows of mankind*"¹ Churchill had announced the capitulation of his country ; and if the R.A.F. had been destroyed by the Luftwaffe and Britain had been occupied, then the fate of the free peoples would have been in the balance for a very long time to come and Russia herself would have had to submit to Hitler's yoke. The battle fought by the R.A.F. in the autumn of 1940 not only made victory certain but shortened the war, which even on the most optimistic reckoning would otherwise have dragged on year after year, like another Hundred Years War, until Hitler was crushed.

Repercussions in the East

As the compromise peace on which he laid so much store was now impossible because of the " obstinacy " of the British, and as the frontal attack had missed fire, what was Hitler's next move to be ?

The documents found in Germany give a clear answer to this question : after the failure of the Luftwaffe over England, Hitler took the first decisive steps towards making war on Russia. As early as 27th August, 1940, the High Command ordered ten divisions and two armoured divisions to be transferred to the Government General of Poland " *with a view to possible swift action for the protection of the Rumanian oil fields.* " ² According to Admiral Raeder, " the fear of no longer being able to retain air superiority over the Channel in the autumn of 1940—and no doubt the Fuehrer realised this before the Naval General Staff, which was not so well informed

¹ Broadcast talk, 17th June.

* See pp. 120-1.

as he on the real results of the air raids on England (our own losses)—certainly compelled the Fuehrer to consider, as early as August or September, 1940, whether a campaign in the East was feasible before victory in the West, so that our last serious opponent on the Continent could be eliminated."¹

The current conception of Hitler as a man completely concentrated on his goal and marching resolutely towards it, almost like one possessed, does not always correspond with the truth. The German Fuehrer wavered between various possible courses of action, some of them contradictory, much more than is generally supposed, and this was especially noticeable in the summer of 1940, when his lightning victory seemed to give him a wide freedom of choice. He knew that the victory was not really won so long as Britain did not admit that it was. He wanted to reach the compromise which he had been offering her for so long. The quickest way of getting it was to cross the short stretch of water over the Channel and bring her to her knees. But such an operation was only possible after the R.A.F. and the British Navy had been knocked out : and that was the business of Goering and his Luftwaffe. For some weeks Hitler had been considering how best the Russian problem could be fitted in with Britain. As a landing in the British Isles was out of the question, he had to fall back on a siege instead of a frontal attack, with the aim of destroying the vital centres of the country and starving it by sinking its supply ships. The success of such an operation seemed assured, but it would take time. And Hitler was anxious to rid himself

¹ Note to Admiral Assmann, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., III, p. 141.

of this problem quickly. As certain facts threw increasing doubts on the successful outcome of the air battle with Britain, the idea of a war in the East suggested itself and took firm hold on his mind. His generals had told him that an offensive could not be launched that year and that it would have to be put off until the spring of 1941, so Hitler intended to use the remaining months the better to prepare the military and political groundwork of the operation. When von Paulus was appointed to the General Staff at the beginning of September, 1940, he found a draft plan of campaign against Russia already in existence, on which he was set to work.¹ This plan, he declared, had been in preparation for two or three weeks.² Instructions from the High Command dated 6th September show that the reinforcement of German units in the eastern territories was planned to be completed by the end of October. " This regrouping must not give Russia the impression that we are preparing an offensive in the East," but she must at the same time be made to understand " that at any moment we have considerable forces at our disposal with which to protect our interests, especially in the Balkans, against a Russian attack." The Intelligence Officers for whom these instructions were intended had the job of concealing the strength of the forces massed in the north and of exaggerating, " if necessary," that of the forces concentrated on the Balkan borders, " particularly the armoured divisions." ³ The intention was not to alarm Russia too quickly, but to induce her all the same to remain passive in the **Balkans. Germany**

¹ See his deposition in *Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc.*, V I I , PP- 254-5.

² *Ibid.* VI, p. 301.

³ *Ibid.*, I I I , pp. 331-2 and cf. *N.C.A.*, I I I , pp. 849-50.

could thus avoid risking a conflict before she was ready for it, and could "wait and see."

It must not, however, be thought that the struggle against Russia took first place in Hitler's schemes, nor that he had just made a choice between East and West. The destruction of Britain remained the principal aim of his strategy. It was for precisely the same reason that Napoleon let himself be swallowed up by the immense plains of Russia about a hundred and thirty years earlier. The documents leave no room for doubt that Hitler dropped the idea of a frontal attack for that of an indirect attack, the object of which was the complete isolation of Britain. She would either have to accept a compromise in the end or give in under the blows of an offensive which would be launched against her in the spring and which, this time, would not fail . . . With these grandiose manoeuvres to isolate Britain—Hitler had, as a matter of fact, to modify them owing to the pressure of unforeseen events—there came successively the conclusion of the Three Power Pact (27th September, 1940), the meetings at Hendaye and Montoire (23rd and 24th October), the talks with Molotov (12th and 13th November), and, finally, the war with Russia.

CHAPTER VIII

Germany and the U.S.S.R. quarrel over the Balkans

FRANCE'S defeat and the failure of the frontal attack on Britain were two factors which were now beginning to influence both Hitler's plans and German-Soviet relations generally. To them was added a third which was to be decisive. In the summer of 1940, a few days after his victory in the West, *Hitler decided that in future he would resist any fresh demands from Soviet Russia.* He was quite willing, for the moment, to give her the territory assigned to her by the secret protocols of 23rd August and 28th September, 1939, but not to make further concessions in Europe.

Berlin and Moscow Begin to Quarrel

There had been a certain amount of friction between Berlin and Moscow during the discussions over the repatriation of German nationals in the Baltic states occupied by the Russians ; and it had been very hard work drafting the Latvian agreement, which was signed on 8th November, 1939.

The secret protocol of 23rd August had assigned Bessarabia to the Soviet zone of influence. Molotov had once more gone out of his way to draw attention to the Soviet's claims on this country in a speech on 29th March, 1940. Hitler knew what Molotov was up to—so well, in fact, that Fabricius, his Ambassador in

Bucharest, had twice (on 4th December, 1939, and 22nd May, 1940) given the Rumanian Government to understand that it would be better to submit to the Soviet's demands, and that in any case Germany could not give any support because " *the Fuehrer was not the man to forget Stalin's great services to him,*"¹ The truth was that it was not a question of being grateful for services rendered but a definite obligation to which Hitler was bound by the Moscow agreements.

On 23rd June, 1940, Molotov informed von Schulenburg that Russia considered the time was ripe *to force a solution of the Bessarabian problem without delay, and that he counted on Germanys support*; the Soviet claims likewise extended to Bukovina, which had not been mentioned in the secret protocol of 23rd August.² Molotov also stated that his Government would wait for the German reply until 25th June,³

Germany could hardly raise any objections as far as Bessarabia was concerned since this province had been given to Russia on 23rd August, 1939 ; but she did protest about Bukovina. This caused the first serious wranglings between the two partners. The Russians accused the Germans of failing in their duty to maintain solidarity, but everything was settled through a compromise by which Moscow agreed to limit its demands to Northern Bukovina, and the Soviet ultimatum to Rumania was drafted on this basis. Germany then advised the Rumanian Government to yield,⁴ and the same advice was given by Italy.⁵

¹ G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 258.

² N.-S.R., p. 156.

³ Schulenburg's telegram of 23rd August, No. 1,208, not published in N.-S.R.

⁴ N.-S.R., p. 163.

⁵ Ciano's *Diary*, 1939-43, P. 271.

When he signed the pacts of August and September, 1939, Hitler was so obsessed with the idea of fighting the war on a single front and isolating Britain that in the heat of the moment he had not realised the full importance of the I.O.U.s he was handing over to Russia. Although he knew they were negotiable, he did not think the Russians would cash them immediately. The occupation and especially the "sovietisation" of the Baltic countries made an unpleasant impression on him. When Moscow showed that it intended to begin the same game in Bessarabia Hitler asked Ribbentrop if the secret protocol he had signed in Moscow did in fact confer this region on the Soviets. Ribbentrop's reply showed that he felt he had to put up some sort of defence, and he excused himself by reminding Hitler that all he had done was to carry out his instructions, in fact, he had not gone as far as he could have done. After making Hitler read through the text of the secret protocol, the German Foreign Minister went on to explain that "at the time of the delimitation of the mutual spheres of interest in Eastern Europe, the Soviets stressed their interest in Bessarabia. On this occasion I stated orally our disinterestedness in the Bessarabian question. However, in order not to put down explicitly in *written form*¹ the recognition of the Russian claims to Bessarabia because of the possibility of indiscretions, with which we had to count in view of the then still very vague German-Russian relationship, I chose a formulation of *a general nature*¹ for the Protocol. This was done in such a way that when the South-Eastern European problems were discussed I declared very generally that Germany

¹ Underlined in the original.

was *politically* disinterested in 'these areas/¹, i.e., in the South-East of Europe- The economic interest of Germany in these South-Eastern European territories was duly stressed by me. This was in accordance with the general instructions given by the Fuehrer for South* Eastern Europe and also, as I recall it, with a special directive of the Fuehrer which I received before my departure for Moscow, in which *the Fuehrer authorised me to declare German disinterestedness in the territories of South Eastern Europe, even, if necessary, as far as Constantinople and the Dardanelles.* However, the latter were not discussed."²

Hitler could not, therefore, shift the blame on to his Foreign Minister. If the concessions to Russia had gone too far, it was on his own instructions. This distressing discovery annoyed him and set him against Moscow even more. His game had been rather wild because he had expected to have an easy-going partner ; but his partner had taken him at his word and had almost immediately rushed off to cash in on all the " general " advantages which he had been allowed. Hitler's reaction was not determined by the Bessarabian question alone, but by Soviet Russia's whole attitude and by her relentless determination. Hitler had never had any dealings with creditors like this. The ink was scarcely dry on the pact when the Moscow leaders launched their grand manoeuvre in the Baltic. Three months later they attacked Finland, and ten months later it was Bessarabia's turn.

¹ The secret protocol of 23rd August stated that " With regard to South-Eastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interests in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinterestedness in these areas." (See p. 41.)

² Note from Ribbentrop to Hitler, 24th June, 1940 ; N.-S.R., pp. 157-8

If for the moment Hitler gave way because he did not want any complications in the Balkans, he felt deeply resentful nevertheless, and this feeling was shared by almost all the Nazi chiefs. That very clear-sighted observer who conceals his identity under the pseudonym of Leonardo Simoni, and who was a high official in the Italian Embassy in Berlin, noted in his journal under the date of 24th June : " This means that Berlin will again swallow the pill, but further Soviet demands will result in a stiffening of Berlin's attitude. All this can have serious and unforeseen consequences."¹ The German leaders grew more concerned about Soviet Russia, and their antagonism against her increased.² They had anticipated Soviet action in the Baltic countries and Rumania and had allowed for it in their calculations, but what made them think twice was " the moment Russia had chosen to put it into effect, and the way she rushed it through." Their Russian creditor " *had already pocketed everything* " and this gave Berlin the uneasy feeling that the East was no longer quite so secure as it had been.⁸ Molotov's assurances in his speech of 31st July⁴ were not sufficient to restore the situation. " The fact is, there is a Russo-German crisis which, although it is cleverly concealed, can be the starting point for what may eventually lead to important developments." * At Nuremberg Ribbentrop told how, when the Soviets were occupying Bessarabia and North Bukovina, Hitler had said to him, "*I will not let myself be overrun by the Russians*"⁴

¹ L. Simoni, *Berlino Ambasciata d'Italia*, p. 136.

² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁴ See pp. 121-2.

⁵ See. Simoni, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁶ R. Cartier, *Les secrets de la guerre*, etc., p. 232.

The state of mind of Hitler and his colleagues during this period is shown by another incident, which went almost unnoticed. When Memel was annexed in March, 1939, Germany concluded a treaty with Lithuania guaranteeing her a free port area in the town. But when the Soviet troops took over the whole of Lithuania the German Government decided—on 9th August, 1940—not to extend the 1939 concessions to the new Lithuania. On 24th August this decision was sent to the Soviet Government, which vainly protested five days later,¹ At about the same time, Hitler was concerned at Moscow's possible designs on Scandinavia, and during a meeting with his naval chiefs on 13th August asked that the northern fjords of Norway should be "more heavily fortified" so that if there was a Russian attack it "would have no chance of success," and so that the Germans could, on the other hand, set up bases there and occupy Petsamo in the event of another Russo-Finnish conflict.²

A Misunderstanding is Cleared Up

The German leaders had on many occasions declared that German-Soviet friendship was all the more solid for being based on the separation of their respective zones of interest.

Hitler himself did his utmost to persuade Ciano of the truth of this during their meeting in Berlin on 1st October, 1939. He then "considered the Moscow agreement to be absolutely unshakeable and such as to

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 175-6 ; telegram from Berlin of 24th August, No. 1,513, unpublished ; N.-S.R., pp. 177-8.

² *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1940, p. 83; cf. *N.C.A.*, VI, p. 986.

prevent the possibility of friction between the Slav and German worlds for a long time to come. *Clarity was the basis of every decision—the Russian and German zones of influence were marked out beyond any possibility of misunderstanding.*"¹ A few weeks later Ribbentrop declared at Danzig that the understanding between the two countries was permanent, since " *the Lebensräume of the two powers adjoin but do not overlap. Therefore any territorial disagreements between the two countries need not arise in the future*"² Again, on 19th July, 1940, Hitler praised before the Reichstag the permanent nature of the Russian agreement, which was based on " *the clear delimitation of the spheres of interest of each power.*"³

In fact, his confidence rested on something which was essentially vague, for the delimitation of the " spheres of interest "—the " living space "—between Germany and Russia was far from being clear, even on the assumption that it would be unaffected by fluctuations in the balance of power between the two countries. Or rather, what was " clear " for Hitler was not at all clear for Stalin.

This made itself apparent in an obvious and almost dramatic way during the Vienna Award (30th August, 1940), when the two Axis powers, after compelling Rumania to cede a large slice of Transylvania to Hungary forthwith and to undertake the speedy return of Southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria,⁴ decided to guarantee the new Rumanian frontiers. As the Hungarian and

¹ Ciano's *Diplomatic Papers*, p. 311.

² Speech made on 23rd October, 1939. Ribbentrop used more or less the same terms in his letter to Stalin of 13th October, 1940, N.-S.R., p. 207.

³ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., III, pp. 140-1.

⁴ Craiova agreements between Rumania and Bulgaria (7th September, 1940).

Bulgarian claims had now **been met, this guarantee** could only be directed against Russia. Russia did not **let** this pass, for she was not satisfied with Bessarabia alone¹ and protested at being confronted with a *fait accompli*.^{*} In his first reply, written on 3rd September, 1940, but delivered to Molotov only on the 9th because in the interval the text had been altered slightly at the request of von Schulenburg, Ribbentrop once more stated the German viewpoint: so far as Berlin was concerned, *the zones of interest between the two countries had been fixed once and for all in the secret protocol of 23rd August, and Russian interests in the Balkans had been finally settled by the cession of Bessarabia.*²

Moscow at once replied verbally that the Soviet Government did not share this opinion.⁴ In a memorandum dated 21st September, Molotov declared that, on the contrary, Russia still had considerable interests in the Balkans and he once more protested that at Vienna Germany had reached decisions on countries (Hungary and Rumania) adjoining Russia's frontiers without consulting her, and had therefore violated article 3 of the non-aggression pact of 23rd August, 1939.⁵

The discussion became embittered and nothing was settled. If Germany persisted in her decision to **keep**

¹ In his conversation with Hitler on 13th November, Molotov claimed Southern Bukovina and requested that the German-Italian guarantee of the Rumanian frontier should be dropped ; N.-S.R., pp. 237-44.

² Meeting between Schulenburg and Molotov, 1st September ; N.-S.R., pp. 180-1.

³ Text of this reply in N.S.R., pp. 181-3.

⁴ Meeting between Schulenburg and Molotov, 9th September, 1940. See the Ambassador's two dispatches on this subject in N.-S.R., pp. 187-8, and especially Hilger's unpublished memorandum.

⁵ N.-S.R., pp. 190-4.

Russia out of the Balkans, relations between the countries would be jeopardised and sooner or later there would be war. For at Vienna Berlin consciously dealt the August agreements of 1939 a blow from which they were never to recover. Ciano was not mistaken when he noted in his diary shortly afterwards : "*The dream of an understanding with Russia has vanished for ever in the rooms of the Belvedere at Vienna*"¹

Germany and Russia at Loggerheads in the Balkans

Russia had never at any time given up the idea of playing an important rôle in the Balkans. She was quite willing to recognise Germany's prior economic claims on Rumanian oil, and this Molotov did in a formal note on 17th July, 1940,² a few weeks after Bessarabia had been occupied. But, politically, Russia wanted to cut off a slice for herself, and thus reoccupy the positions traditionally held by Czarist Russia.

She set out vigorously to achieve this. Lavrentiev, the Soviet Minister, was very active in Sofia. Early in October, 1939, Molotov took soundings with the idea of concluding a pact of mutual assistance, but this was rejected by the Bulgarian Government.⁸ On 5th January, 1940, a Russo-Bulgarian trade and navigation treaty was signed, followed on 15th March by the opening of a direct air line between Sofia and Moscow. After concluding a trade and navigation treaty with

¹ *Ciano's Diary*, 1939-43, p. 291; cf. also the Ribbentrop-Ciano meeting on 19th September, 1940, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 390-2.

² Telegram from von Schulenburg, No. 1,405, unpublished.

³ *N.-S.R.*, p. 124.

Yugoslavia on 11th May, 1940, Russia renewed diplomatic relations with her on 24th June.

During these negotiations, which took place in Moscow, the Soviet leaders asked that Russia should be given a place on the International Danubian Commission, which had just decided on certain measures for the protection of shipping on the river.¹ This question was to come up again as a result of a move by Germany which had alarmed Moscow. What Germany had done was to summon the riparian states and Italy to Vienna on 5th September, 1940. When the conference ended on the 13th it had decided to dissolve the International Commission and had agreed on various provisional arrangements until new regulations had been drawn up. After a protest from the Soviet Government, which was surprised not to have been invited to the conference,² Molotov told von Schulenburg on 14th September that he approved of the dissolution of the International Commission but demanded the dissolution of the European Commission as well ; both should be replaced by a single Danubian Commission in which the U.S.S.R. would be represented. The agreement was made in October. Germany accepted the Russian proposals. Britain and France were excluded from the new Commission, and Italy retained her seat.³ On 28th October the German, Italian, Rumanian and Soviet delegates met at Bucharest to discuss the new regulations for the Lower Danube.

Britain reacted strongly to the Soviet attitude. On

¹ The Commission sat from 5th to 17th April in Belgrade.

² Message from Vyshinsky to von Schulenburg, 11th September, 1940. cf. G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 65.

³ The European Commission was in control of the Danube from Braila to the sea. For these discussions see G. Gafencu, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-70.

29th October the British Ambassador in Moscow, "Sir Stafford Cripps, handed Molotov a note of protest from his Government which stated that the Soviet attitude to the Danubian Commission constituted " a breach of neutrality." The Soviet Government rejected this protest on 2nd November, repeating the German argument that the Commission was none of Britain's business as she was " thousands of kilometres away from the Danube."¹ It was true that the Danube did not flow through Italy either, but Germany had formally demanded her presence. And Russia was all the more inclined to fall in with this stretching of the " principle " applied against Britain as she counted on Italy to defend her own interests in the Balkans.

The idea of reaching an agreement with Italy over this probably first occurred to the Soviet Government as a result of a conversation in Rome between von Mackensen and the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires on 25th May, 1940. During the conversation the Reich Ambassador mentioned Italy's imminent entry into the war and suggested that "*all problems in the Balkans could be solved without war by mutual co-operation between Germany, Italy and Russia*"*

Was this a purely personal move on Mackensen's part, made without the knowledge of the Wilhelmstrasse ? That was to be Ribbentrop's argument later, but it is not borne out by the evidence. Ribbentrop had made the German-Soviet pact the pivot of his policy and until half-way through June, 1940, he was advising Italy

¹ These facts and the contents of the Soviet note were published in a Tass communique on 4th November, 1940. The Nazi leaders were overjoyed at the " anti-British attitude " shown by Moscow. See *N.C.A.*, VI, p. 989.

² *M.-S.R.*, p. 144.

to seek an understanding with Russia. During his talk with Mussolini on nth March he "pointed out that it would be to the advantage of the Axis if relations between Italy and Russia could again become good."¹ When, after being estranged for several months, Rome and Moscow decided that their Ambassadors should return to their posts, Ciano noted in his diary on 8th June : "*Ribbentrop will be happy over this, since it was one of the great objectives of his policy*."*

What had happened to make the Wilhelmstrasse pull up short and practically repudiate von Mackensen ? The reason was that in the meantime the victory in France had confronted Hitler with the problem of the future status of Europe ; he thought that thenceforth he could solve it without having recourse to Russia's help, and he wished to forestall any subsequent thrust by Russia towards the Balkans. The speed with which the Russians were carrying out their occupation of the Baltic states showed him how forceful and dynamic his partner was. Hitler was determined not to go beyond the outside limits laid down on 23rd August and 28th September, 1939.

That was why Molotov tried in vain to prevent von Mackensen's "proposals" from slipping through his fingers. From 3rd June, 1940, he repeatedly asked for details and further elucidation of the German Ambassador's very interesting remarks. He returned to the charge on 7th June, but to no purpose* Finally, on 16th June, Ribbentrop in his reply stated that what von Mackensen had said was of no importance, and that the question of their respective spheres of influence in

¹ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 350.

² *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P. 262.

the Balkans had been settled in the secret protocol of 23rd August, 1939, when Germany had agreed to Russia's annexation of Bessarabia.¹²

Mussolini Acts on Impulse

Notwithstanding Ribbentrop's blunt reply, Molotov did not retire from the game, for he thought he had found an ally in Mussolini.

Mussolini was "deeply hurt" at the back-stage part to which Hitler had relegated him. Ever since his first meeting with Hitler in June, 1934, he had acted as his mentor, and now he was condemned to listen to him almost without being able to get in a word edgewise. He felt that both Italy and he himself were a "negligible quantity" in the eyes of his powerful partner. This had been made quite clear to him when the French armistice conditions were being settled, for Hitler had set more store on winning the co-operation of France, a vanquished enemy, than on meeting the claims of Italy, his ally.

On the other hand, Mussolini saw with some disquiet that Germany was casting an eye on the Balkans, and he was anxious to slow up her expansionist tendencies before they reduced the Italian share in this region to a mere fraction. For a brief moment, therefore, he supported the Russians in the game they were playing. It was one of those muddle-headed, impulsive gestures, thought up on the spur of the moment, which were typical of his foreign policy, especially after 1934. This

¹ Telegram from von Schulenburg, 6th June, M.S.R., p. 144 ; telegram from von Schulenburg, 7th June, No. 1,094, unpublished ; telegram from Ribbentrop, 26th June, N.-S.R., p. 148.

was 'the reason for his attempt to reach an understanding with Russia.

The Italian representative in Moscow was M. Augusto Rosso, described by M. Gafencu, who was in a position to know, as "a diplomat of great experience and wisdom."¹ He was in von Schulenburg's confidence and enjoyed the esteem of his Anglo-Saxon colleagues. After being recalled at the end of December, 1939, as a result of the tension created by the Italian Government's pro-Finnish attitude,² he was sent back to Moscow at the beginning of June with instructions to restore relations between the two countries to normal and to prepare the ground for a trade agreement. Molotov, who had never lost sight of the suggestion thrown out by von Mackensen³ and who thought that the defeat of the Western democracies was imminent, tried to discover Italy's "plan of campaign" at their first meeting on 13th June, three days after Italy had become a "belligerent." The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs clearly betrayed his disappointment at the Italian Ambassador's replies, which were too vague for his taste. M. Rosso knew that before the Kremlin would sign a trade agreement with Germany it would insist on the acceptance of certain very definite "political premises"⁴ and warned his Government that it would have to talk politics if it wished to obtain results. Mussolini jumped at the suggestion and told M. Rosso that here they could "go very far." That is why M. Rosso could return to Molotov on 20th August and turn his new instructions to good advantage.

¹ G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 51.

² *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P. 190.

³ See pp. 142-3.

⁴ See p. 17.

Molotov was delighted, but, in accordance with the methods which both suited his own temperament and were the accepted convention in Stalinist diplomacy, asked a great number of pointed questions and proposed " *consultations between Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union with a view to a common policy in all matters relating to the Danube basin, the Balkans and the Black Sea:* " ¹

M. Rosso was not, for the moment, in a position to pursue the conversation as far as Molotov wished to take it. The Soviet Ambassador in Rome, M. Gorelkin, who had seen Giano on 22nd June and had asked him " some questions about the Balkans," was fobbed off with assurances as vague as they were cordial. ² A few days later, on 25th June (two days after von Schulenburg was informed of the Soviet decision to settle the Bessarabian question and two days before the ultimatum to the Rumanian Government), Molotov, now grown impatient, summoned the Italian Ambassador and first read, then handed him a note " *dealing with the question of the Danube, the Balkans, the Dardanelles, and the Soviet frontiers in Asia Minor:* " ³ He was as outspoken and at the same time as insinuating as it was possible to be. In his opinion ⁴ the war might possibly be over " before

¹ A. Rosso, *Obbiettivi e metodi della politica, estera fascista*, p. 20. The author rightly remarks that " from June, 1940, Moscow had the intention of intervening in every problem which concerned south-eastern Europe and the Black Sea " on equal terms with her two partners, Germany and Italy, and that this was " the origin of those unsurmountable differences with Germany which a year later led to an armed conflict."

² *Ciano's Diary 1930-431* p. 269.

³ G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 52.

⁴ This account of the Molotov-Rosso meeting on the 25th is taken from von Schulenburg's report of it to Berlin ; see N.-S.R., pp. 160-1.

the winter," or just after. They should therefore **hasten** " *without delay* " the settlement of any political problems which were still outstanding and reach agreement immediately on how to share out the loot. Italo-Soviet relations should be placed " *quickly and for good* " on " *the same satisfactory basis as those of the U.S.S.R. and Germany* " The Soviet Government's attitude on a number of points was quite definite : it supported Bulgaria's demands for the Dobruja and for access to the Aegean ; it wanted at all costs to see a settlement of the Bessarabian question ; it regarded Turkey with deep suspicion, for Turkey persisted in retaining exclusive control over the Dardanelles and constituted a threat to the Soviet South and South-east against which Russia was determined to protect herself, although here German and Italian interests would be taken into account. In this connection, the respective positions of Russia and Italy were to be defined as follows : " *In the Mediterranean, the Soviet Government would recognise Italy's hegemony, provided that Italy would recognise the Soviet Government's hegemony in the Black Sea* " ¹

Mussolini was very proud of these overtures and hoped conversations would take place between the three powers at which his role would no longer be confined to absorbing Hitler's oracular utterances in silence. In a speech on 31st July Molotov expressed satisfaction at the " improvement " of relations with Italy. " An exchange of views " he declared " had shown that in the field of foreign policy it is highly probable that our two countries will reach a mutual understanding."

In other words, Moscow and **Rome** were **apparently agreed** on preventing the Germans from seizing the

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 160-1.

whole of the Balkans, and on taking a slice for themselves whatever happened.

The understanding with Moscow became an *idée fixe* with Mussolini for several days. He spoke of it to Ciano on 4th August,¹ and again on the 6th. " *He wants me to arrive quickly at an agreement with Russia which should have a 'spectacular' character*" Ciano wrote in his diary. " *He also raised the question of my going to Moscow. Litvinov's visit was never returned*"² What a triumph it would be for the " Duce " if, by sending Ciano to Moscow, he could get even with Hitler and repeat the sensation of 23rd August, 1939, all on his own !

But Molotov was mistaken in thinking that Mussolini would put up any real show of resistance to Hitler. He still believed that Mussolini was a " tough " ; but Hitler, notwithstanding his sincere friendship for his comrade, had discovered that Mussolini was a weakling and had reproached him for remaining shackled to the monarchy and for keeping a " traitor " like Ciano in his entourage.

Thus when he heard that Rome and Moscow were discussing a *rapprochement* which would *harmonise with German-Soviet relations*, Ribbentrop warned Italy, in a note to von Mackensen on 16th August, 1940, *not to encourage the U.S.S.R. into attempting to settle the Balkan question*. The language of the note was plain and amounted to a thinly disguised veto. " *Now that the Axis,*" it ran, " *is endeavouring in the Balkans to urge Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania to negotiate, it does not seem to me to be in our interests to bring the Russians into thi*

¹ Ciano's Diary, 1939-43) P- 280.

² Litvinov went to Rome on 3rd December, 1933, three months after the signature of the Itab-Soviet pact of friendship ; he had a " long and cordial interview with Mussolini."

question in any manner whatsoever." Ribbentrop added that it was better " *to leave the question of the Dardanelles in abeyance.*"¹

That killed the Molotov-Mussolini "plan" stone dead, even before its birth. Ribbentrop's warning to the Italian Government was enough to cause its collapse. A new attempt at the end of December, 1940, suffered the same fate.^f Mussolini did his best to maintain good relations with the U.S.S.R., but there was little point in doing so.

Finland: Another Stake in the Game

Another shadow which fell between Germany and Russia was the increasing divergence of their views on Finland, which had, as a matter of fact been assigned to Russia, in the secret protocol of 23rd August. At the end of October, 1939, Molotov had shown concern at the presence of German warships in the Gulf of Finland, and to dispel the Soviet leaders' misgivings Berlin had agreed to shift their operational area slightly to the west. • During the Russo-Finnish war relations between Berlin and Moscow had been excellent.⁴ But as soon as the campaign in France was over, and especially after the annexation of Bessarabia, Hitler feared that Russia would attack Finland and in August he therefore decided to take certain precautions in northern Norway.⁵

¹ Telegram from Ribbentrop to von Mackensen, No. 1,115, unpublished. This note was also communicated verbally to Alfieri, Italian Ambassador in Berlin. See L. Simoni, *Berlino Ambasciata d' Italia*, pp. 161-2 and *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, p. 284.

² See especially L. Simoni, *op. cit.*, pp. 197, 200, 203-6 and cf. D. Alfieri, *Due dittatori di fronte*, pp. 206-7.

³ N.C.A., VI, p. 979.

⁴ See pp. 89-90.

⁵ See p. 137.

Germany suddenly concluded an agreement with Finland for the transport of troops and equipment to Kirkenes across Finnish territory, the first ships to be unloaded on 22nd September. Under the terms of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact Germany had agreed to give Russia advance information of such arrangements. But, making use of the technique which she was in future to employ with her partner,¹ Germany did not do this until the last minute, so that, while it was too late for effective action, she kept more or less to the letter of the agreement. Ribbentrop's instructions asking von Schulenburg to inform Molotov of the Finnish agreement were dated 16th September, but he told him not to deliver the information until "the evening of September 21st," that is, just when the German ships were nearing the Finnish coast and were within a few hours of landing there.²

There were explanations from Berlin, but the Soviet chiefs remained very suspicious. The fact that Germany had also reached agreement with Sweden for the transport of troops over her territory⁴ did anything but quiet their fears. They therefore insisted on being supplied with further information concerning the duration of the German-Finnish agreement, the number of German troops involved, and whether the troops were going only to Kirkenes.⁴

All these questions were left practically **unanswered**. A **real** race developed **between** the two **Governments** for an **option** on the Petsamo **nickel** mines.⁵ This resulted

¹ See p. 139.

² The text of the agreement was not made known to Moscow until 4th October, 1940 ; *N.-S.R.*, pp. 202 and 203-4.

³ *M.-S.R.*, p. 202.

⁴ *N.-S.R.*, p. 204.

⁵ *M.-S.R.*, p. 205.

in a "deterioration" in German-Russian relations which was "slight"¹ according to von Schulenburg, but which proved to be serious when judged in the light of future events.

Spain and Morocco

While Molotov continued his probings and Mussolini flirted with vague schemes, risking having to give them up at a frown from Hitler, Hitler and Ribbentrop had made a start on the political and economic organisation of Central Europe and the Balkans under German protection.

In the autumn of 1940 Hitler did not contemplate any further military operations before the following spring. The all-important problem was still the isolation of Britain. He had by then given up the Spanish venture because he considered Franco's conditions for allowing him into Spain and giving him his active support to be too severe. Among other things, Spain wanted the whole of Morocco and the Oran region, which might have precipitated a revolt in French North Africa. Also, Hitler did not wish Morocco to become the exclusive property of Spain because he had designs on it himself. On 28th September, 1940, he therefore decided a second time against Spain's participation in the war,² and as Serrano Suñer seemed to be disappointed, Ciano remarked: "Why hasn't he yet seen that the Germans have had an eye on Morocco for a long time?"³ During the Brenner conference with Mussolini on 4th October,

¹ *N.C.A.*, VI, p. 988.

² *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P-²95- See also *The Spanish Government and the Axis, 1946*, document No. V I.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

1940, Hitler spoke of " the treaty proposed by the Spaniards, by which Germany would undertake to provide Spain with ample food supplies in return for a promise of Spanish intervention as soon as her military preparations were completed. But over and above the supplies, they have asked that Spain should be given Gibraltar and French Morocco from Oran to Cap Blanc."

Apropos of this, he " remarked first of all that Germany claimed a stretch of the Moroccan coastline as a base for her own commerce. Either Casablanca or Agadir would do . . . Hitler was also afraid that by agreeing to make territorial concessions of this kind to Spain he might produce two reactions : first, the occupation by England of the Spanish bases in the Canaries ; and secondly, the adherence of the French North African Empire to the de Gaullist movement.^{5,1} The results of the talks between Franco and Hitler at Hendaye on 23rd October—just before Montoire—were not, therefore, of any great importance.

The Balkans and the War in Greece

Elsewhere, Hitler's chief worry was to keep the Balkans more or less quiet until the spring so that he could thoroughly exploit the Rumanian oil-fields. He might have thought that this was a way of throwing off, or at least whittling down, the allegiance to Russia forced on him by his need for her motor oil.

Germany therefore resolutely and methodically set about obtaining control of the whole Danubian and Balkan region. On one side, she was asking Italy not to

¹ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 396.

undertake any action against Yugoslavia and **Greece** ;¹ on the other, she was busy on her own behalf trying to obtain what she wanted. In April, 1940, the German General Staff sounded Budapest on the possibility of being allowed to transfer troops for the occupation of the Rumanian oil-fields.¹ The handing back of Transylvania was already being discussed there, and this took place through the Vienna " Award " on 30th August. A German military mission went to Rumania in September,⁸ a move directed as much against the Russians as against the British.

In fact, included among the duties of the mission, as laid down in the High Command's operational order of 20th September, was that of preparing the way for the deployment of German and Rumanian troops " in the event of our being forced into war with Soviet Russia."⁴

The German troops were expected in Rumania at the beginning of October, and they arrived on the 11th. As usual, Berlin informed Moscow at the last minute : on 9th October Ribbentrop instructed von Schulenburg to notify Moscow the following day, that is, when the troops were already on the move.

Russia protested⁵ and Mussolini, who a few days earlier had been vainly hoping that Italy would be given some share in the operation, gave way to an outburst of fury and indignation. It was then that, partly

¹ *Ciano's Diary*, 1939-43, p. 284.

² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

³ Ribbentrop referred to it during his meeting with **Mussolini** in Rome on 19th September, 1940 (unpublished **notes** of Schmidt, the interpreter).

⁴ *N.C.A.*, VI, p. 877. See confirmatory evidence by von **Paulus** at Nuremberg {*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., **VI**, p. 256}.

⁵ *N.-S.R.*, pp. 206-7.

through Ciano's influence,¹ he decided to attack Greece. "Hitler," he said, "always faces me with a fait accompli. This time I am going to pay him back in his own coin. He will find out from the newspapers that I have occupied Greece. In this way the equilibrium will be re-established"¹

What actually happened was that he informed Hitler of his intentions in a letter written on 19th October, but arranged for it to arrive too late. For months he had been telling Hitler that the war should not be allowed to spread to the Danube and the Balkans, but now a spiteful impulse made him put a match to the powder.

Hitler was kept in France by the talks at Hendaye and Montoire, and it was in vain that he left for Italy as soon as he could to persuade the Duce to give up his dangerous enterprise.⁸ On 28th October, the day he met him in Florence, the Italian offensive was launched on the Greek-Albanian frontier.⁴ "We attack in Albania and talk in Florence" Ciano remarked on the same day with malicious pleasure.⁶ Hitler was "extremely displeased,"⁶ "very annoyed," because he feared that this would complicate matters with Yugoslavia at a moment when he was making every effort to win her over to his policy.⁷ He complained to Ciano at Salz-

¹ Ciano began his intrigues to provoke the war with Greece as early as August. See General Quirino Armellini, *Diario di guerra*, Milan, Garzanti, 1948, pp. 54-60.

² *Ciano's Diary*, 1939-43, p. 297.

³ See the statements of Keitel, who accompanied Hitler, in *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X, pp. 522-3.

⁴ On 13th October, D-day had been fixed for the 26th; on the 18th it was postponed until the 28th. See General Q. Armellini, *Diario di guerra*, pp. 111 and 119.

⁵ *Ciano's Diary*, 1939-43, p. 301.

⁶ Statements by Keitel, referred to in note 3.

⁷ Statement by Ribbentrop at Nuremberg, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X, pp. 287-8.

burg,¹ and later, on 20th November, to Mussolini,² in a letter written in so harsh a tone that the Duce shamefacedly admitted that Hitler had "rapped him over the knuckles"³ like a schoolmaster with an unruly pupil. When they rushed into the Greek adventure neither Ciano nor Mussolini had the slightest notion of what its consequences would be, or that it would bring Italy to the end of her tether and put her still more at Germany's mercy. But the chief risk was that it would spoil Hitler's plans. From this point of view it was, according to the German army chiefs, "a serious strategic blunder."⁴

¹ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P- 397.

² *Lettres secrtes Hitler-Mussolini*, pp. 82-8.

³ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, p. 309.

⁴ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1940*, p. 126. See pp. 182-3, 185-6.

CHAPTER IX

Molotov in Berlin (12th-13th November, 1940)

IN the summer of 1940 German-Soviet relations, and through them the European situation, were influenced by a new factor : *Hitler firmly resolved not to allow the Russians to advance any further in Europe.* His decision was apparent in an increased stiffening all along the new frontiers created by the 1939 agreements.

In the far north Germany concluded a " transit agreement " with Finland in the second half of September, 1940, allowing for the free passage of German troops on their way to northern Norway.¹ It was apparently only a provisional arrangement which was to terminate when the military needs of the war against Britain no longer existed. But Moscow was not taken in by this. In a conversation with von Schulenburg on 26th September, Molotov again showed that he suspected the agreement and asked to see the text, *including its secret clauses.*² He insisted on further explanations and described the presence of German troops in Finland, a country within the sphere of influence awarded to Russia in August, 1939, as contrary to Russian interests ; and during his talks with Hitler in November Molotov again made strenuous efforts to have these troops withdrawn.

¹ See p. 150.

² N.-S.R., p. 198.

When Germany cancelled the former German-Lithuanian agreements for the free port of Memel¹ she showed that she meant to deprive Russia of anything which could provide her with a base of operations outside the boundaries of the now " Sovietised " Baltic states. Hitler had planned to settle the future of the Danube region without consulting Russia or allowing her a share in it. When, following her protests, he adopted a more conciliatory attitude, it was only the more effectively to throw dust in her eyes—as will be seen.² German policy in the Balkans and the Dardanelles was undoubtedly intended to prevent the U.S.S.R. from crossing the frontiers of July, 1940, over which Germany had written *ne plus ultra*.

The Three Power Pact

But this new factor did not change Hitler's general strategy. His principal aim was still victory over Britain, either by isolating her or by a frontal assault, or by both at the same time.

The main objective of the pact signed by Germany, Italy and Japan in Berlin on 27th September, 1940, was to isolate and weaken Britain. It was a pact of mutual assistance based on a redistribution of vast spheres of influence in Europe, Africa and Asia. Europe and Africa (the German " geo-politicians " were to speak of " Eurafrica ") were assigned to Germany and Italy, and Far-Eastern Asia to Japan.

Ribbentrop went to Rome on 19th September to win Italy over to the idea. During his conversation with

¹ See p. 137.

² See pp. 179-80

Mussolini he brought up the question of Russia's possible reaction to the tripartite military alliance. He personally was very optimistic. Russia would not, he thought, be thrown into the arms of the Western democracies, as might be feared. " Stalin was an intelligent statesman " who did not intend Russia " to shed her blood for England and France " and who would have everything to lose through such a venture, since Hitler had taken his precautions and was ready for any eventuality. They need not worry : " Stalin will continue his bargain-hunting. Up to now he has exploited the situation very much to his own advantage. He was quite within his rights, but there is a limit to everything." This limit was fixed by the Vienna Award. There was no question of adopting a " hostile policy towards Russia," all that was needed was " to define clearly the spheres of influence." If this were done, friendship with Russia could continue and she could even become " more deeply involved in our game." Mussolini agreed with him entirely and thought that Russia's " main anxiety was not to lose what she had already won."¹ Hitler repeated the same opinion about two months later during his interview with General Antonescu : " Russia will never fight against a coalition such as that of Germany and her friends. Stalin does not wish to risk anything, he only wants to win."²

The Three Power Pact must undoubtedly have given Russia something to think about and have removed any temptation she may have had to attack Germany, **for** she risked finding herself attacked by **Japan in Siberia.**

¹ See the two existing reports of the conversation on 19th September : Ciano's (in *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 389-93), and the unpublished notes of Schmidt, the interpreter.

² Schmidt's notes, unpublished.

But fundamentally the pact was not directed against Russia. In fact, when the pact was signed the Nazi leaders anticipated reaching a new agreement with her much wider in scope than that of August and September, 1939- Between a Europe controlled by Germany and Italy and a Japanese-controlled East Asia there remained a large area which—if Russia would only fall in with Berlin's views in future—was to be reserved for her. " *Do you know what I planned ?* " Ribbentrop explained at Nuremberg. " *I wanted a rapprochement with the Russians. I wanted to include them in our three power pact and make it a four power pact*"¹ This " plan " later provided the main theme in the discussions with Molotov at Berlin in November, 1940.²

What Germany intended was to use the Three Power Pact as a means of tackling the problem which lay at the root of her policy and strategy—the problem of increasing Britain's isolation so as " to have a free hand to deal with her for all emergencies,"⁸ either through the much-desired compromise or through war to the bitter end. The Nazi leaders continued to believe that Britain went on fighting only because she thought Germany and Russia would eventually fall out and America would enter the war. With Russia there was to be another and even greater sensation than that of 23rd August, 1939, and Britain would give up all hopes of detaching her as soon as she saw Russia finally lined up on the side of the three powers which had recently signed the Anti-Comintern Pact against her. And America would doubtless abandon any idea of intervening in Europe,

¹ G. M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary*, p. 88.

² See p. 163, *et seq.*

³ G. M. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 88, statement by Ribbentrop.

since by doing so the Three Power Pact would automatically bring in the Japanese in Asia and she would be forced to fight on two fronts. It was therefore true that the pact was directed " against the American war-mongers," as Ribbentrop reassured the Russians,¹ and that it was designed " to keep the United States out of the war," as he later confirmed at Nuremberg.²

German-Soviet Policy at the Cross-roads

If the sole aim of Germany's policy had been to block Russia's aspirations in the West, she would have been irrevocably committed to war with her partner of 1939-40. But her Russian policy continued to fit in as part of her British policy, the latter being the more important of the two.

All this was in the autumn of 1940. No large-scale military operation against either Russia or Britain was possible in the Balkans or the Mediterranean until the following spring. Hitler had therefore some weeks, even some months, in which to make his choice. And on this choice depended the whole development of the war and of the world situation.

In an appreciation of the situation which Admiral. Raeder made to Hitler on 26th September, 1940, just before the signing of the Three Power Pact, the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy pointed out that it was possible to avoid clashing with Russia by carrying out a large-scale operation to seize the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, thus delivering a knock-out blow at the British Empire. Hitler agreed : " *He believes,*"

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 195-6.

² *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X, p. 294.

Raeder said, " *that Russia should be encouraged to advance southwards or towards Iran and India, so as to find an outlet to the Indian Ocean much more important than her positions in the Baltic.* " He was of the opinion " that Russia is afraid of Germany's strength and that she will not attack Finland this year."¹ A week earlier Ribbentrop had said to Mussolini: " *We could divert Russia towards the Persian Gulf and India.* " ²

It was precisely this possibility which was left wide open by the Three Power Pact. Germany saw in it a two-fold advantage : she could divert Russia towards the east and south-east of Asia, where German interests were not directly involved ; and in this area Russia would also clash with Britain.

" *L'Invitation au Voyage* "

Hitler and Ribbentrop were both fully aware that they would have to resort to drastic measures, as was the case in August and September, 1939. If Russia renounced her ambitions in the Balkans she would have to be offered something considerable by way of compensation, in the hope that it would tempt her to fall in with Germany's plans.

Starting from this assumption, Ribbentrop went into action. On 13th October, 1940, he sent Stalin a very long letter in which, after reviewing the course of the war and repeating his assurances regarding Germany's intentions towards Russia, he painted an imposing picture of the future relations between the two countries

¹ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1940, p. 106. See also Raeder's statement at Nuremberg, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., XIV pp. 103-5.

² Schmidt's notes, unpublished.

as Hitler saw them. Hitler hoped that Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy and Japan *would come to a far-reaching agreement on their political aims, based on a delimitation of their respective interests which would last for centuries*. Ribbentrop would be happy to welcome Molotov to Berlin in order to discuss the agreement and would willingly return to Moscow himself to resume the exchange of ideas personally with Stalin and, if possible, with representatives of Italy and Japan.¹

Ribbentrop's letter was delivered at the Kremlin only on 17th October, its translation at the German Embassy in Moscow having taken several days. The Wilhelmstrasse later asked the Embassy for an explanation of the delay. Molotov immediately admitted the need for a visit to Berlin, and two days later he officially accepted the invitation.² The official reply to Ribbentrop's letter was delivered on 21st October and was written and signed by Stalin. He agreed that relations between Germany and the U.S.S.R. were capable of further improvement through a new definition of their respective spheres of influence : "*I agree with you,*" he wrote, "*that a further improvement in the relations between our countries is entirely possible on the permanent basis of a long-range definition of mutual interests*"³

He suggested 10th-12th November as the dates for Molotov's visit and agreed to the idea of a subsequent discussion with Ribbentrop in Moscow, but postponed a decision on joint deliberations with Italy and Japan. While, therefore, Hitler was sounding out the French and Spanish Governments (he met Laval on 22nd

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 207-13.

² N.-S.R., p. 214; telegram dated 19th October from von Schulenburg, No. 2,233, unpublished.

³ N.-S.R., p. 216.

October, Franco on the 23rd, and Petain on the 24th), he had decided to try to secure Russia's adherence to the Three Power Pact with, as he thought, a good chance of succeeding. When he went to France for the meetings he already knew that his advances had had a favourable reception, first from Molotov and then from Stalin. In his conversation with Franco at Hendaye he told him : " England is wrong to place any hope in Russia. *If Russia were to abandon her passive role, she would at least come over to the German side* "¹

The German leaders thought that Molotov's visit showed every sign of producing the desired results. Stalin's letter was brought to Berlin personally by Gustav Hilger. Molotov requested that the intended journey should be kept a close secret.⁵ Ribbentrop was optimistic and reminded Molotov, in a letter on 8th November, of his promise to bring a portrait of Stalin to Berlin, and Molotov assured him on the same day that he would comply with this friendly request.³

The Molotov Talks in Berlin

Molotov reached Berlin at midday on 12th November. Shortly afterwards he had his first conversation with Ribbentrop, and during the afternoon his first conversation with Hitler. Next day, on the 18th, he met Hitler again in the afternoon and had a final talk with Ribbentrop during the evening. The notes taken at all these meetings by Paul Schmidt, the interpreter, are available,

¹ *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, published March, 1946, document No. VIII.

² N.-S.R., pp. 216-17.

³ Telegrams No. 2,023 from Berlin and No. 2,377 from Moscow, both unpublished.

and for the last meeting between Molotov and Ribbentrop the memorandum by Gustav Hilger, who was present, has also been found.

At the first meeting with Molotov¹ Ribbentrop wanted to draw up a sort of political programme for his stay in Berlin. There were three important subjects for discussion : the adherence of the Soviet Union to the Three Power Pact ; the definition of the spheres of interest between the contracting powers ; and the revision of the Montreux agreements. In the new world share-out which he had in mind, Russia was to receive south-east Asia towards the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, with at the same time the assurance of a freer access to the Mediterranean. " *The German-Soviet Pact*" he recalled, " *has benefited both partners*" who " *had together done good business*" The question was now whether " *they could not continue to do good business together*," thanks to the disintegration of the British Empire.²

After admitting that the distribution of the spheres of influence decided in August, 1939, was only a partial solution and was therefore now obsolete, Molotov came round to the idea that there would have to be a new share-out and asked a few questions. The discussion was not pursued farther for the moment ; it was resumed shortly afterwards with Hitler.³

As usual, Hitler started off with a grandiloquent survey of the whole situation. According to him, the war against Britain was as good as won ; it was only a matter of hastening the end, and this would be achieved through the agreements now being **drawn up** with

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 217-25.

² N.-S.R., pp. 221-2.

³ N.-S.R., pp. 226-34.

France and Spain and through the Three Power Pact German-Soviet co-operation was possible on the basis of a new definition of their spheres of influence ; Russia should turn towards the East, towards Asia.

Molotov was in general agreement with Hitler's ideas about German-Soviet relations, and he was also of the opinion that " *it would be in the interest of Germany and the Soviet Union if the two countries would collaborate and not fight each other*" He declared that on this point, as on all the others, he was expressing Stalin's own views.¹ But he was not dazzled by the wonderful prospects which the German dictator unrolled before his eyes. When confronted by Mussolini, Franco, Laval or the Balkan politicians, Hitler had got used to impressing his listeners by the breadth of his ideas, but he could not get a grip on Stalin's emissary.

Paul Schmidt, the interpreter, described to his wife the impression Molotov had made on Hitler : " *Molotov struck Hitler as being not a diplomat but, to use his own words, ' a mathematics teacher.' Molotov was never ruffled and was not a coiner of phrases. He stuck to the facts and never wandered from his argument. He confronted Hitler as his equal*"²

And so while Hitler made strenuous efforts to tempt Molotov with prospects of the " warm seas " of the Indian Ocean and offered him a large slice of " Greater Asia," Molotov obstinately returned to Europe, a subject they would have preferred him to leave alone. He **was** in entire agreement with the Fuehrer's statements on the role of America and Britain. " *Russia's participation in the Three Power Pact appeared to him entirely acceptable in*

¹ N.-S.R., p. 232.

² Account by Mme. Schmidt, *Journal de Genbe*, 31st October, 1946.

principle, provided that Russia was to co-operate as a partner and not simply as an object"¹ Hitler spoke to him about the future ; Molotov, while taking good note of the offers they were making, kept mainly to the present and asked some precise questions. Before "*partitioning the British Empire* " there were other partitions closer at hand in Europe on which Germany and Russia must now come to some agreement. There was no need to bother Italy and Japan with them.

After outlining Russia's neo-imperialist programme during his first conversation with Hitler, Molotov gave further details in their second interview on the afternoon of the 13th.⁸ Certain Russian demands had first to be met. The U.S.S.R. felt she was again being *threatened by Finland*, whom the agreement of August, 1939, had brought within the Soviet sphere of influence ; and Germany should recognise Russia's full liberty of action in this country and withdraw the troops she had sent there. Germany had guaranteed the new Rumanian frontiers ; did this guarantee apply to Russia as well ? The U.S.S.R. intended to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with Bulgaria, in which she would undertake not to interfere in the internal order of the country and would allow the king to remain. Lastly, she wanted to settle the problem of her security in the Black Sea, and could only do so if she had concrete guarantees ; these could be provided only through the possession of bases in the Dardanelles.

In the dialogue forced on him by these considerations, Hitler endeavoured to wrap up his dissent in reassuring comment. So far as Finland was concerned he did not

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 233-4.

² M.-S.R., pp. 234-7.

repudiate the agreements of August, 1939, but Germany could not tolerate the outbreak of another war in the Baltic. Before deciding his attitude to the assistance pact which Russia intended concluding with Bulgaria, he wanted to know if Bulgaria had asked for it, and what Mussolini thought of it. As for the Dardanelles, Germany favoured a revision of the Montreux Convention which would facilitate Russia's access to the Mediterranean and close the Black Sea to the warships of non-riparian powers, but she could not go as far as accepting the establishment of Soviet bases on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

The Last Talk Between Ribbentrop and Molotov

After a day and a half of discussion, they had still not succeeded in reconciling their opposing points of view : so Ribbentrop, after a dinner to which he was invited at the Soviet Embassy on the evening of the 13th, made a supreme effort to secure Molotov's consent to his plans. As there was an air-raid warning in Berlin, the conversation took place in the shelter at the Wilhemstrasse and was continued there until midnight.¹

In an attempt to limit their discussion and to reach a decision, Ribbentrop put all his cards on the table. He had ready some definite proposals for a treaty, which was to be accompanied by two secret protocols. Through it Russia was to concur in the aims of the Three Power Pact; the four signatory powers were to define and respect each other's spheres of influence and were not to join any combination of powers directed against any one of them. The first secret protocol went into precise

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 247-54.

details of the division of the spheres of influence : Central Africa for Germany ; North and North-East Africa for Italy ; Southern Asia for Japan ; the Middle East towards the Indian Ocean for the U.S.S.R. The second secret protocol recognised the Soviet Navy's right of unrestricted passage through the Dardanelles under all circumstances, whereas the warships of the non-riparian powers were not to be allowed to enter the Black Sea,

Molotov first replied to these two points. Russia, he said, would certainly be delighted to expand in the direction of Iran, but this must be discussed in greater detail ; as for the Dardanelles, he needed more than "*paper guarantees*." He then added a whole list of Soviet interests and demands *in Europe*. Setting aside the question of Finland, which had been fully discussed with Hitler, he emphasised that Russia still had interests in Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece ; she insisted on settling her relations with Bulgaria on the basis of a pact of mutual assistance ; she had something to say about the future status of Poland¹ ; and lastly, she was very anxious to maintain Swedish neutrality and to preserve her freedom to pass from the Baltic to the North Sea through the straits between Denmark and Scandinavia.

Thus the hopes entertained by Hitler and Ribbentrop of diverting Soviet aspirations towards eastern Asia seemed to have come to nothing, since they had run up against Russia's fixed determination to pursue a policy of no retreat and expansion in the West, and locally all over Europe. The Berlin conversations had merely served to measure the distance separating their respective positions.

¹ See p. 68.

Molotov left Berlin at midday on 14th November, exactly two days after arriving ; he knew what the German proposals were, and on his return to Moscow could report them accurately to Stalin.

The Soviet Conditions for Joining the Three Power Pact

On 25th November, 1940, ten days after his return to Moscow, Molotov summoned von Schulenburg and gave him the Soviet Government's reply to the German proposals.¹

The U.S.S.R. was prepared to accept Ribbentrop's plan *that it should join the Three Power Pact, but on certain well-defined conditions.*

They took as their starting point the two secret protocols put forward by Ribbentrop on the evening of 13th November.

The first protocol, dealing with the spheres of influence, must recognise that "*the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf is recognised as the centre of gravity of the aspirations of the Soviet Union*"

The second protocol required extensive amendment: the U.S.S.R. should receive the right to establish a land and naval base in the Dardanelles ; Turkey was again to be invited to join the pact, which would now be a Four Power Pact ; if she agreed, her territorial integrity would be guaranteed by Germany, Italy **and** Russia ; if she refused, the three Powers would **take the necessary military and diplomatic steps to make good their** interests.

The Soviet Government **asked** for **three** further **secret**

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 258-9; and cf. Ribbentrop's statements at Nuremberg (*Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc.*, X, p. 314).

protocols in addition to the two suggested by Ribbentrop and thus amended. In the third, Germany was to undertake the immediate withdrawal of her troops from Finland ; in the fourth, Japan was to renounce her rights to coal and oil concessions in Northern Sakhalin ; the fifth protocol was to state that " *Bulgaria was within the security zone of the Soviet frontiers, and that a mutual assistance pact between the U.S.S.R. and Bulgaria was therefore a political necessity, this pact in no way to affect the internal regime of Bulgaria, her sovereignty or independence.* "

In this official statement the U.S.S.R. was defining in great detail the conditions on which she was prepared to enter the orbit of the pact signed by Germany, Italy and Japan two months previously in Berlin.

The Reich never answered the Soviet Government's proposals, although Russia subsequently asked for a reply on several occasions.¹

¹ Especially by its *demarche* on 17th January, 1941, *N.S.R.*, pp. 270-1. At Nuremberg Ribbentrop referred to a telegram from Moscow in December, 1940 (*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X, p. 315).

CHAPTER X

The race into war

ON 12 th November, 1940, probably a few hours before Molotov's arrival in Berlin, Hitler issued directive number 18, signed by Jodl,¹ which dealt with the military situation. The idea of invading Britain was provisionally abandoned, but all the operations enumerated in the directive were intended to be the opening phase of a large-scale manoeuvre to isolate her. The most important objectives were : to capture Gibraltar, obtain a foothold in Morocco, and thus " chase Britain out of the western Mediterranean." France, in the meantime, might perhaps be persuaded to support Germany in the struggle. In the eastern Mediterranean the British were to be trapped between the German drive towards Greece and the Italian push in Egypt. The Axis air forces were given the job of hunting the British fleet from its lairs.

The document also explained that the movement of the German forces eastwards was to continue while the Reich Government tried to discover and *clarify the present attitude of Russia.*² This was precisely what Hitler was up to in his talks with Molotov, for the first of their interviews was during the afternoon of the **same day**.

Hitler had been most disappointed and annoyed at **the**

¹ Full text in N.C.A., I I I , pp. 403-7.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 406-7.

result of the conversations.¹ On 13th November he told Goering that Russia's demands must be rejected and that he would not tolerate her ambitions in southern Europe.² Keitel later explained that these demands "alarmed the Fuehrer. Molotov was considering making war on Finland a second time so as to occupy the whole country, and he was also thinking of expanding in the direction of the Balkans and the Dardanelles. The Fuehrer saw in these schemes the beginning of a great encircling movement against Germany. Just then he was receiving reports on the tremendous expansion of the Soviet war industries, and this worried him a great deal."³ Molotov was quite willing to receive his slice in the new world share-out which was being planned in the Three Power Pact, but without having to give up the Balkans. Hitler had no illusions about this. "Herr Molotov" he wrote to Mussolini on 20th November, "has made it plain that he was becoming increasingly interested in the Balkans"⁴ Any doubts there may have been on this score were dispelled by Molotov's letter of 25th November, 1940, in which he stated the conditions on which the Soviet would join the Three Power Pact.⁵ The plan on which the Nazis had worked for several weeks for refloating the pact of August, 1939, and diverting the Russians from the Balkans did not survive the test

¹ See Chapter I X. Among the reasons which hastened the clash with Russia, Admiral Raeder gave "the personal impression which Hitler had received from Molotov's visit," *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X I V, p. 328.

² D. C. Poole, *Light on Nazi Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1946, pp. 22-3 of the off-print. See also Goering's statements at the hearing of 15th March, 1946, at Nuremberg (*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc.).

³ R. Carrier, *Les secrets de la guerre*, etc., p. 239.

⁴ *Lettres secrètes Hitler-Mussolini*, p. 83.

⁵ See pp. 169-70.

of the Berlin talks. According to von Papen, who is a good judge, it was then that Germany lost the war,¹ since that was the moment when war with Russia became inevitable.

Caught in the Toils

Thenceforth the war with Russia became Hitler's obsession. The naval chiefs, especially Admiral Raeder, insisted on its being postponed until after the victory over Britain,⁸ but Hitler did not give way to their arguments. Bearing in mind, he said, "*Russia's inclination to interfere in Balkan affairs, it is necessary to eliminate at all costs the last enemy remaining on the continent*"² before possibly being able to reach an agreement with Britain. For Britain was sustained in her struggle only because of the hopes she placed in the United States and Russia. The United States had been neutralised by the Three Power Pact, but the only thing to be done with Russia was to eliminate her. "*Stalin,*" Hitler told his admirals, "*must be regarded as a cold-blooded blackmailer; he would, if expedient, repudiate any written treaty at any time.*" Britain's aim for some time to come will be to set Russian strength in motion against us. If the U.S.A. and Russia should enter the war against Germany, the situation would become very complicated. *Any possibility or such a threat to develop must be eliminated at the very beginning*"⁴

His decision was made between the end of November

¹ D. C. Poole, article referred to above, p. 20 of the off-print.

² *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1940, pp. 124 and 138, conferences of 14th November and 27th December.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1941, p. 13, conference of 8th-gth January, 1941.

and the end of December, although he tried to conceal it even from Mussolini.¹ At the beginning of December Hitler agreed that the offensive should be launched on 15th May, 1941, a date suggested to him by General Haider² and given in directive number 21 containing the strategic data for "operation Barbarossa" against the U.S.S.R. Soviet Russia was to be thrown back beyond a line running from Archangel to the Volga, and the German Air Force would, if necessary, undertake to destroy the distant industrial centres in the Urals.⁸

Hitler thought he could bring this immense operation to a successful conclusion in a few months "by means of a quick campaign before the end of the war with Britain." Chronologically, Russia was now first on the list for execution, but the main objective was still victory over Britain.

The defeat of the Luftwaffe in the autumn of 1940 proved that to continue the offensive against Britain Germany would have to throw in everything she had, and could not afford the luxury of detaching a large force to guard the eastern front. The rapid conclusion of a victorious campaign in the East would allow her to concentrate all her resources against her principal enemy before Britain could utilise the shipments from America which, for 1942, were said to be on a very large scale.

On the other hand, since there was no likelihood, as

¹ See, for example, his letter of 31st December, 1940, to Mussolini, in *Lettres sorites Hitler-Mussolini*, especially pp. 109-10.

² H. C. Deutsch, *Quand Hitler et Staline se partageaient le monde*, in *La Bataille*, 30th April, 1947.

³ N.-S.R., pp. 260-4. These directives gave the detailed application of the plan of campaign outlined in General Haider's report to Hitler of 5th December, 1940. See *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., III, pp. 331-a and N.C.A., IV, 374-5.

Ribbentrop himself realised, of the war with Britain ending before 1942, and even the risk that it might last longer, Germany needed a substantial part of Russia's economic resources. The Nazi leaders recognised this fact when they met in Berlin on 2nd May, 1941 : "*The war can only be carried on if our armed forces are fed entirely by Russia during the third year of hostilities.*"¹ Alfred Rosenberg had reminded them a month earlier that the principal aim of the occupation of Russia was "*to acquire those materials which were essential for continuing the struggle against England*"²

At this point the question may be asked why Germany did not agree to discuss the Soviet proposals outlined in Molotov's letter of 25th November, 1940. Why did she not try to reach a political compromise ? And why was Russia not asked for even greater supplies, which she would doubtless not have refused to provide ?

The reason seems clear. It was too late for the two partners to return to the state of affairs—and to the illusions, in so far as they ever had any—existing in August and September, 1939. Each had revealed his plans, and his greed, during the conversations in November, 1940. At Berlin they had put their cards on the table, and now the spell was broken. From that moment Molotov knew that Hitler would not stand for any further Soviet encroachments in the North or in the Balkans. Hitler was afraid that as soon as he was heavily engaged in the West in the final struggle with Britain, Stalin would seize the opportunity of carrying out his

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., I I, p. 296 and cf. N.C.A., V, p. 378.

² Memorandum on the U.S.S.R. dated 2nd April, 1941 ; *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., H I, p. 351 ; and cf. N.C.A., III, P. 675.

programme by annexing Finland, occupying Bulgaria and moving into the Dardanelles. Germany and the U.S.S.R. had each sized up the other's lust for power, which from now on was to be indulged in identical areas. Their interests had seemed reconcilable in 1939, but now they conflicted. Neither side could ever trust the other again. The two partners had had time to get to know each other well ; the similarity of their methods and the same lack of scruple which had enabled them to work together in 1939 now made them enemies.

The Struggle in the Balkans

The Soviet leaders wished to stay out of the war at all costs. Their plan was thenceforth to wait for the war to spread, until both the United States in the West and Japan in the East were involved. If Russia succeeded in keeping out of the fray until the eleventh hour, she would then no doubt be in a much better position to obtain her share in the partitioning of the world.

The Russian leaders were well aware of the aims of German policy in the Balkans and did all they could to counteract them, but they confined themselves for the moment to political and diplomatic methods. The Communist parties were mobilised, and from the end of 1940 they started to agitate against German influence in the Danubian countries and the Balkans, forming a nucleus inside these countries for all those currents of opinion and movements capable of fighting or merely paralysing the activities of any government which happened to be pro-German, such as the Serb nationalists in Belgrade and the " Iron Guard" in

Bucharest. Even more important, they embarked on a battle of notes and communiques which showed their distrust and dislike of Berlin's new policy.

But Germany was in a hurry, and was daily reinforcing her positions in the Balkans with complete disregard for Soviet protests. Actually, these could not go very far, for whereas Hitler had decided on war, Stalin was anxious to avoid it. Barely a week after Molotov's return to Moscow a whole series of agreements which had been brewing for some time was put through under German auspices. On 20th November, 1940, Hitler met the Hungarian leaders in Vienna and secured their adherence to the Three Power Pact. On the 22nd General Jan Antonescu went to Berlin, where Hitler asked for his support in the struggle against the " Slav wave " and dazzled him with the possibility of getting his " revenge " on the Russians ; on the following day Rumania too joined the Three Power Pact. On the 28th the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Markovic, went to Berchtesgaden. The position in Yugoslavia was more difficult, and Hitler had to step more warily and arrange the change-over with tact. But he took drastic measures : if Yugoslavia would go over to the Axis and assist Germany in the Balkans, even if she did not play an active part, she would receive a share of the booty at Greece's expense by being allowed to occupy Salonica. Bulgaria's share was to be Eastern Thrace.¹

This worried the Russians, and they tried to parry the blow. As Molotov had explained at Berlin, they were particularly interested in Bulgaria. Consequently, on 18th November, 1940, Molotov summoned Stamenoff, the Bulgarian Minister in Moscow, and speaking in a

¹ For all these meetings, see Schmidt's notes (unpublished).

"vigorous yet friendly" way, made the following statement: " Is Bulgaria too going to join the Three Power Pact ? Bulgaria's future is of great concern to Soviet Russia who, because of her historic responsibilities, wants a strong Bulgaria. The Soviet Government is of the opinion that Bulgaria should achieve her national aims against Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece. It had said as much to Hitler. The Soviet Government is ready to give every assistance to Bulgaria. It will also support the present Bulgarian regime and the Czar (Boris), whom it considers to be intelligent and loyal. But the Bulgarian Government must inform him of its ties with Italy and Germany . . . If there is any question of a guarantee it will also be given by the Soviet Government."¹

Nothing was achieved by the Soviet's pressure on Bulgaria and the many fair words that accompanied it, especially as the Bulgarian leaders knew precisely what Russia's real intentions were, for they had been bluntly described by Molotov in the Berlin talks. Stalin's representative in Berlin had, it is true, declared that Russia would not change the internal order of Bulgaria " by a hair's-breadth,"¹ and that she intended to secure for her " an outlet to the Aegean Sea,"³ but he had demanded for Russia the right to give her a special guarantee based on a pact of mutual assistance.⁴ Moreover Sofia soon found out that in its written proposals of 25th November the Soviet Government had asked that,

¹ Dispatch from Woermann, No. 2,138, dated 22nd November, 1940 (unpublished).

² N.-S.R., p. 244.

³ Ibid., pp. 245-6.

⁴ Ibid., p. 244.

in exchange for joining the Three Power Pact, Bulgaria should be included in the Russian sphere of interest and security.¹

On 25th November, 1940, a week after the Moscow talks, the Soviet Government officially sent its proposal for a pact of mutual assistance to Sofia. On the same day the Soviet representative at the Danubian Conference, Skobelev, was granted an interview by King Boris and spoke also to M. Filov, the head of the Government. The plan miscarried, for in his reply on 30th November the Bulgarian Foreign Minister explained that although the Bulgarian people did not renounce their claims on Western Thrace, they preferred to achieve them " by peaceful means " without a clash with Turkey, who would have been alarmed by the pact proposed by Moscow. It might also risk spoiling the friendly relations between Bulgaria and Germany. These were all reasons which made them prefer to have nothing to do with it. On the other hand, the Bulgarian Government had in principle agreed to join the Three Power Pact—and surely Russia could see no harm in this " *as she was considering doing the same thing herself*"²

Moscow found it difficult to accept the situation created in Rumania by the presence of German troops. The Soviet Government had already tried to come to an agreement direct with Bucharest on the question of jointly administering the " maritime Danube," from which Germany and Italy were to be excluded, but

¹ N.-S.R., p. 259.

² Unpublished telegram of 30th November, 1940, from Richthofen, German Minister in Sofia. Ankara reacted strongly to the Soviet Proposal to Bulgaria. See Weizsaecker's telegram to von Schuknurg 17th January, 1941, No. 68, unpublished.

Antonescu had informed Hitler of this manoeuvre.¹ On 11th December Moscow came back with a new set of proposals, which were rejected.² Actually, this move recoiled on the heads of the Russians, for it gave rise to a German *démarche* in Moscow³ and caused a deadlock in the Danubian Conference. The Conference adjourned on 22nd December and its work was never resumed.⁴

Germany, now sure of Hungary and Rumania and hoping at least to neutralise Yugoslavia, persevered methodically with her plans. Hitler himself confirmed to Mussolini the fact that since 13th December "German troops were almost continuously en route for Rumania" whose railways had been placed at their disposal.⁵ The Soviet Government wanted precise details of the numbers involved and the purpose of the troop movements, but Ribbentrop ordered von Schulenburg to avoid answering these questions.⁶

Bulgaria : The Slippery Slope

To reach the Greek frontier, all that remained was to win over Bulgaria. The Soviet leaders vainly hoped to prevent Germany from seizing this country. On 17th

¹ In his talk with Hitler in Berlin on 22nd November, 1940, "Antonescu mentioned the difficulties with the Russians on the question of the Danube delta . . . He also alluded to Russia's efforts to exclude Germany and Italy from the Danube Maritime Commission." (Schmidt, unpublished notes.)

² Dispatch from Glodius, 12th December, 1940, No. 2,286 (unpublished).

³ Von Schulenburg's report of 3rd January, 1941, on his talk with Molotov on 29th December (unpublished).

⁴ With reference to this question, see G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, pp. 65-84.

⁵ *Lettres secrètes Hitler-Mussolini*, p. 107.

⁶ N.-S.R., p. 266, von Schulenburg's dispatch of 8th January, 1941, and Ribbentrop's reply of 10th January.

January, 1941, Molotov summoned von Schulenburg and, after expressing surprise at not having received a reply to his letter of 25th November, betrayed his anxiety at the concentration in Rumania of German troops who were apparently ready to march into Bulgaria. Were they going to occupy Greece and the Dardanelles? Molotov emphasised, as he had already done in Berlin, *that Bulgaria was in Russia's security zone* and that it would be a violation of this zone if it were occupied by German troops.¹ Ribbentrop replied on 22nd January that the sole purpose of the measures taken by Germany in the Balkans was to prevent the British from landing in Greece. Once this had been achieved, the German troops would be withdrawn.*

Instead of reassuring the Russians, these statements merely increased their fears. Berlin was in fact working steadily to secure Bulgaria's co-operation in its plans and succeeded in doing so during the second half of February, 1941. Nothing better reveals the German tactics than Ribbentrop's instructions to von Schulenburg on 27th February. The German Ambassador was to telephone Molotov on the evening of 28th February and announce that Bulgaria would formally sign an undertaking to join the Three Power Pact on 1st March. No written note, and not a word more. Next day, on 1st March, again in the evening, von Schulenburg was to telephone Molotov a second time and inform him that German troops were entering Bulgaria. If there was any discussion, he was to repeat the usual assurances. Molotov protested and declared that Russia would not support Germany's action in Bulgaria. It was the least

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 268-9 and 270-1.

² N.-S.R., pp. 271-2.

he could say, and von Schulenburg notified Berlin that Moscow would confine itself to a protest.¹ On 1st March the Bulgarian Government informed the Soviet Minister in Sofia that it had agreed to the entry of the German troops. Vyshinsky told the Bulgarian Minister in Moscow that this would drag Bulgaria into the war and that his Government "could not support the Bulgarian Government in the application of its present policy." That was all.

Sand in the Machinery

Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria : the chain was complete, and Germany could march her troops into Greece whenever she pleased.

But a few grains of sand managed to find their way into this precision-made machinery. It ought to have run smoothly enough, but they came near to throwing it out of gear.

First, there were the unfortunate experiences of the Italian armed forces in Africa, the Mediterranean and Albania. General Wavell's offensive began on 9th December, 1940. The attack took the Italians by surprise—it "*came like a thunderbolt*" Ciano remarked sadly in his diary²—and in the space of a few weeks the British had reached Benghazi. The second claw of the pincer movement which was to have thrown back **the** British to Suez was broken. Hitler had at first refused to send troops to stiffen the shattered Italian forces in Libya, but to avoid disaster he was forced to form **the Afrika Korps**. In the Mediterranean the **Italian fleet**

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 276-9.

² *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, P. 315.

was so severely mauled as to be practically annihilated at Taranto, so much so that it was scarcely in a condition to guard the convoys. But most serious of all was what happened on the Greek frontier, for instead of advancing into Epirus the Italian divisions were thrown back into Albania and suffered a series of defeats. The Italian ally was becoming a millstone round Hitler's neck, and Field Marshal List's troops had to occupy Greece as much to tow out the Italians as to drive out the British.

Spain's reaction to this state of affairs was unfavourable. On 7th December, 1940, Admiral Ganaris sent Franco a message from Hitler asking him to allow the free passage of the German troops due to enter Spain on 10th January, 1941, for the attack on Gibraltar.¹ Franco had been very enterprising in June, 1940, but he had now grown wiser : thenceforth " he was scared,"² and fear gave him the courage to refuse. Meanwhile, the chances of inveigling France into co-operating against Britain were reduced by the palace revolution at Vichy on 13th December.

The Coup d'Etat in Yugoslavia

Hitler's plans were disorganised by yet another event. In Yugoslavia, everything seemed to be going smoothly. On 25th March the Belgrade Government agreed to join the Three Power Pact ; but two days later it was overthrown by a *coup d'etat* and the Regent, Prince Paul, was expelled. This exploit was backed by the pro-Soviet faction. Hitler, very angry, decided on war, whatever

¹ *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, 1946, document X I .

² That was Hitler's own opinion: *Lettres smites Hitler-Mussolini*, p. 126.

the promises made to him by the new government. He reached this decision on 27th March during a conference with the High Command at which the operational orders were drawn up.¹ The attack was launched on the morning of 6th April.

Stalin was delighted by the turn of events in Belgrade at the end of March. It could, he thought, bring the German machine to a halt. It was war in the Balkans, a mountain war in which the Wehrmacht would wear itself out, or at any rate be side-tracked for a time from the eastern frontier. It was important that Yugoslavia should hold out as long as possible. To encourage her to resist, Stalin suddenly signed a friendship and non-aggression pact with M. Gavrilovic, the Yugoslav Minister in Moscow, on the morning of 6th April. It amounted to nothing more than moral support and vague promises ;² and Stalin had 5th April inserted as the date of the pact so that Germany should not be able to accuse Russia of violating Yugoslavia's neutrality.⁸ Nobody was taken in by this little stratagem. According

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., V I I , p. 229 and N.C.A., IV, pp. 275-8 ; von Paulus's evidence, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., V I I , pp. 237-8, 257. General Lohr's evidence, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., V I I , p. 236. Hitler had already summoned the Bulgarian and Hungarian ministers on the night of 27th-28th March, when he informed Mussolini, in a letter which' his Ambassador, von Mackensen, was instructed to deliver to him immediately ; text of the letter in JV.C.A, IV, pp. 475-7.

² In the " Foreign Office Report on the Soviet Government's propaganda and political agitation " published in Berlin on 22nd June, 1941, it was stated that on 10th April the Moscow Government had proposed to the Yugoslav Minister that war materials should be sent to his country via the Black Sea. According to information from a Rumanian source, noted in the German Naval documents, the Soviet's offer of war material to some extent influenced events in Belgrade. (See N.C.A, V I , p. 996.)

* Interesting details on this subject in H. G. Cassidy, *Moscow Dateline*, pp. 13-14.

to Ribbentrop, Hitler considered the Soviet gesture *an insult*,¹ although Moscow had taken the precaution of informing him of it beforehand.²

The combined Yugoslav and Greek campaigns (operation Marita) were over in a few days. The Serbian Army surrendered unconditionally on 17th April, and on the 27th the Germans reached Athens. As early as 15th April the British began to evacuate the troops rushed in from Egypt. The last formations had left the Peloponnese by the end of the month and all these British operations ended in a victory for Germany with the occupation of Crete (20th-31st May).

The right flank of the " operation Barbarossa " zone was thus strongly protected against an attack from Africa or the Near East. Any possible threat to the Rumanian oil-fields had been averted. But for Germany the most serious, and indeed the irreparable result of events in Belgrade was that she found it impossible to keep to her " D day " for the attack on Russia on 15th May, the date decided in December.¹ " At the beginning of April this date had to be postponed by about five weeks, that is, put forward to the second half of June."⁴ On 30th April it was finally fixed for 22nd June.⁵ The consequences of postponing it were later summarised by Karl von Ritter, the Ambassador, as follows : " *This delay cost*

¹ Statement by Ribbentrop at Nuremberg, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X, p. 293. It should be noted, however, that while the pact was directed against Germany, the Naval chiefs did not consider it " to be too important " since " there was no common frontier " between Russia and Yugoslavia. (N.C.A., VI, P. 996.)

² N.-S.R., pp. 316-18.

³ See pp. 173-4.

⁴ Statement by von Paulus, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., VII, pp. 255-6. The decision seems to have been made on 3rd April.

⁵ N.C.A., VI, p. 996, No. 142.

the Germans the winter battle before Moscow, and it was there that the war was lost."¹

At Daggers Drawn

The U.S.S.R.'s refusal to effect some kind of withdrawal into Asia, as Berlin had suggested, and her fixed determination to continue expanding westwards, re-kindled in Hitler and his colleagues the distrust and hatred which had been damped down by their ten months of profitable co-operation. For Hitler, Stalin now stood revealed as a "cold-blooded blackmailer"² who had to be got rid of ; and Ribbentrop, so smitten formerly, now declared that he was "extremely sceptical of the good faith of the Russians."³ Hitler saw the only guarantee of good relations between Russia and Germany in the German divisions drawn up on the frontier.⁴ The Berlin conversations which were to inaugurate a new period of co-operation "built to last centuries" had even brought down the scaffolding of the August-September agreements of 1939.

In this connection, Germany had chalked up several things to her credit. The Soviet leaders had been forced to disclose the full extent of their ambitions in order to resist the pressure applied to them by the Three Power Pact. They described them in precise and unequivocal terms in their proposals of 25th November. They thus presented Hitler with a dangerous weapon which he later used against any countries so threatened.

¹ D. C. Poole, p. 23 of the off-print of the article previously quoted.

² See p. 173.

³ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, p. 419.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 433.

Thenceforth they were all afraid of being left face to face with their powerful neighbour in the East, who they knew was ready to pounce on them at the first favourable opportunity.

It is lamentable that Finland and Rumania should have ended by linking their destinies to the military might of Germany and become the left and right wings respectively of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front. But their blunder can to some extent be explained ; it was due primarily to the attitude of Soviet Russia. Finland would undoubtedly have kept out of the world conflict if Russia had not attacked her in December, 1939, and dismembered her in March, 1940. Nor would she have entered the war at the end of June, 1941, had not Russia demanded, at Berlin in November, 1940, a free hand to " settle accounts with her." It was owing to these incontrovertible facts that Hitler was able to entice Finland into the German camp. The first contacts between the General Staffs of the two countries were made as early as December.¹ Moscow's chief aim was to isolate Finland so as to subjugate her the more easily. In a conversation with Ribbentrop on 12th December, 1940, Dekanozov, the new Ambassador in Berlin, stated that Russia had " deliberately adopted a hostile attitude " to the proposed agreement which was being considered by Finland and Sweden. In December, 1939, during the honeymoon period of the German-Soviet Pact, Germany had intervened to prevent the

¹ Among other evidence concerning these contacts, see that of General Erich Buschenhagen at the hearing on 12th February, 1946, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc*, VII, p. 310. The Finnish Army had already been allotted its part in " Operation Barbarossa " in the directives of 18th December; *N.-S.R.*, pp. 261-2.

Scandinavian countries forming a united front with Finland.¹ Why should she not do the same now? In an effort to persuade him, Dekanozov produced a report from Mme Kollontai, the Soviet Ambassador in Stockholm, alleging that behind these plans for a Finnish-Swedish *rapprochement* was "the desire to free Finland from German influence" The Soviet Government was "strongly opposed to them." But Ribbentrop prevaricated, and the Soviet *demarche* had absolutely no effect.²

Rumania, already worried by the encroachments of the Soviet troops in the Danubian delta, was convinced that Russia wanted to annex the whole region of Moldavia, and "hoped that Germany would prevent this by armed force."³ Between December, 1940, and March, 1941, Antonescu saw Hitler three times and the terms of the German-Rumanian military alliance were settled.⁴ During this period Russia became increasingly isolated. Hungary took advantage of the Belgrade crisis to attack Yugoslavia;⁵ Bulgaria intervened in Thrace and Macedonia;⁵ and Turkey, now warned of Russia's designs on Eastern Anatolia and the Dardanelles proclaimed her non-belligerency.⁷ Russia made every effort to calm her fears, but in vain. The Soviet Govern-

¹ See pp. 89-90.

² Report of the interview by the interpreter, L. R. Meyer-Heydenhagen (unpublished).

³ N.C.A., V I, pp. 991-2.

⁴ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., V I I, pp. 162-4, 276, 304-7, 315-16.

⁵ On 10th April. On 12th April the Hungarian Minister in Moscow informed M. Vyshinsky of the reasons why his Government had sent its troops into Yugoslavia. Vyshinsky declared that the Soviet Government could not approve of this action "especially as Hungary had made war on Yugoslavia after concluding a treaty of perpetual friendship with her." (Tass communique, 13th April.)

⁶ On 20th April, 1941.

⁷ On 10th April, 1941.

ment had denied early in February various rumours that it had reached "a secret agreement to provide Turkey with arms so that she could oppose any possible outbreak in the Balkans."¹ But now, disturbed by the turn of events, it published a note on 25th March stating that if Turkey was attacked she could count "on the complete understanding and neutrality of the U.S.S.R."¹ From the end of February, 1941, von Papen became very active in Ankara and his efforts resulted in the signing of a German-Turkish treaty of neutrality and non-aggression on 18th June.²

Preparations for the Eastern Offensive

On their side, Hitler and his leaders speeded up preparations for the military onslaught on Russia,⁴ camouflaging it, especially from mid-April, as a diversionary manoeuvre in the impending attack on Britain. It was to be "the greatest piece of deception in history."*

The first political and economic directives for their policy in the eastern territories were drafted at the same time. In Keitel's initial instructions on 13th May, 1941, "Reichsfuehrer S.S." Himmler was entrusted

¹ Tass agency, 4th February, 1941.

² See also G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, pp. 140-1. This statement by the U.S.S.R. was regarded in Berlin as being "directed against Germany" ; *N.C.A.*, V I, p. 995.

³ For von Papen's activities, see the documents published (by the Soviet Government) in *Documents secrets : La politique allemande* (1941-3), I, Turquie ; Paris, P. Dupont, 1946.

⁴ See especially Hitler's conference with his military chiefs on 3rd February, 1941, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., V I I, pp. 337-8.

⁵ *N.C.A.*, V I, pp. 847-8. For this diversionary manoeuvre see also a letter from the German G.H.Q. to Todt (*N.C.A.*, I I I, pp. 634-6) and the instructions of 12th May, 1941, signed by Kettel (*N.C.A.*, I I I, pp. 635-6).

with a number of "special missions."¹ Anti-Jewish measures were drawn up as early as 19th March² and detailed instructions were ready by 7th May.³ A note from the Fuehrer's Headquarters signed by Warlimont on 12th March ordered the "immediate liquidation"⁴ of any Red Army political commissar taken prisoner, and next day there was a further order from Hitler signed by Keitel containing instructions for the application of martial law in the occupied territories.⁵

On about 2nd April, 1941, Alfred Rosenberg, the great "specialist" on Eastern affairs, had written a report on the U.S.S.R. and the fate that was in store for it.⁶ His zeal was rewarded shortly afterwards by his appointment on 20th April as "Reich Minister for the Eastern Occupied Territories."⁷ In this capacity he drew up a preliminary establishment for his department, in a note written on 29th April,⁸ and on 8th May sent to "all Reich Commissars for the Eastern Territories" his first instructions regarding the future status of Russia. Included in this programme was the reoccupation of the Baltic states and the dismemberment of the "Russian Empire."⁹

In the economic sphere, General Thomas, head of the

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc.*, III, pp. 339-41; N.C.A., III, pp. 409-13.

² N.C.A., III, p. 636.

³ N.C.A., III, p. 690.

⁴ N.C.A., Supplement A., pp. 352-3.

⁵ *Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc.*, IV, pp. 455-7; MCA., III, 637-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 351-3; N.C.A., III, pp. 674-81 and appendix of 4th April, pp. 681-5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III, p. 354; N.C.A., III, pp. 621-3.

⁸ N.C.A., III, pp. 685-90.

⁹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals, etc.*, III, 351-2; N.C.A., III, pp. 692-3.

War Economics Department of the O.K.W., held a meeting of his staff towards the end of February, 1941, to work out a scheme for the economic exploitation of the eastern territories.¹ The "Oldenburg Plan" committee went over them in detail several times, for example, on 21st March² and 29th April.³ A meeting of Reich Secretaries of State, to which reference has already been made,⁴ decided on 2nd May that the Soviet territories were to provide all the foodstuffs necessary for the whole of the German armed forces, although they anticipated that this "would doubtless result in the death of several million people from starvation."⁵ Directives for this plan were given in a memorandum from the Economics Department of the O.K.W. dated 23rd May.⁶

There was, therefore, no need for any improvisation, for everything was worked out to the last detail at least a month before the offensive began. The most atrocious measures were discussed and planned by the Nazi leaders—under Hitler—not in the heat of battle, but cold-bloodedly and resolutely in the peaceful atmosphere of their committee meetings. All the documents proving their existence provide terrifying evidence of the extent to which a combination of passion, self-interest and doctrine can corrupt the ruling caste of a country and, through it, a whole section of its people.

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, I I I , pp. 347-8 ; N.C.A., I I I , pp. 911-13.

² N.C.A., I I I , pp. 908-11.

³ N.C.A., I I I , pp. 811-16.

⁴ See p. 175.

⁵ N.C.A., V, p. 378.

⁶ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., IV, pp. 5-9 ; N.C.A., VII, pp. 295-306.

The Neutralisation of Japan

When M. Matsuoka, the Japanese Foreign Minister, left Moscow for Berlin towards the end of March, 1941, he was very sceptical of the chances of signing a non-aggression pact with Russia, for the Russians were demanding conditions which Tokio had no intention of accepting. Back in Moscow at the beginning of April, M. Matsuoka again made contact with the Kremlin, but this did nothing to dispel his pessimism. He told Steinhardt, the American Ambassador, that he had very little hope of concluding a treaty with Stalin because Stalin did not want one, and because " the Japanese public would not stand for the concessions which the Russians were asking for a non-aggression pact."¹

M. Matsuoka was scarcely cut out for discussions with the Moscow leaders. He had left Tokio with a number of rather preposterous ideas about the Soviet régime. In an interview given in the train a few hours before reaching the capital of the U.S.S.R. he had made a point of mentioning that " racially the Slavs were half Asiatic, which meant that the Russians and the Japanese had much in common, both emotionally and in their spiritual make-up." During his first meeting with Stalin on 25th March " he lectured him on Japanese ideology for fifty-eight minutes out of the sixty-minute interview, maintaining that there is a close parallel between Communism and Japanese family life."² This was an optical illusion resembling, on a rather more farcical

¹ Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan*, London, Hammond Hammond, 1944, p. 330.

² *Ibid.* p. 330. But see von Schulenburg's dispatch on this conversation, N.-S.R., pp. 280-1.

plane, that from which the Axis chiefs had been suffering for some time.¹

Just when he was expecting the complete failure of his mission, Matsuoka was suddenly summoned to the Kremlin on the morning of 13th April, the very day he had arranged to leave. Stalin suggested a pact of neutrality and friendship, to be signed at once, and withdrew his demand that Japan should give up her mining concessions in North Sakhalin. The pact even included a tentative division of their respective spheres of influence : Manchuria to Japan, Outer Mongolia to Russia.

When Matsuoka signed this treaty Japan was one of the partners in the Three Power Pact. During their interviews with him Hitler and Ribbentrop had left him in no doubt that a break with Russia was possible, but they had not asked Japan to be in at the death.² This apparent contradiction can be explained from the German documents and evidence. For Hitler, the aim of the Three Power Pact was essentially to paralyse Britain and threaten America. If Japan had attacked Russia as well, she would have had to relinquish for some time any attempt to oppose Britain in the Far East. Hitler wished to take on Russia himself, for he did not think he needed any assistance in "crushing" her. This was undoubtedly one of his most serious blunders, for if Japan had intervened in Siberia Stalin would not have been able to withdraw those divisions which played such a vital part in restoring the military situation in European Russia. Hitler, confident that he

¹ See pp. 75-7.

² Report of the conversations between Matsuoka, Hitler and Ribbentrop, *N.-S.R.*, pp. 281-316.

could beat the Russians in a few weeks; preferred Japan to attack Singapore, and between December, 1940, and April, 1941, the German leaders never stopped trying to persuade Japan to do this.¹ At his meeting with Raeder on 24th April Hitler explained that "the Russo-Japanese Pact had been concluded with Germany's acquiescence" and that it diverted Japan from Vladivostok and encouraged her "to attack Singapore instead."² Later, at Nuremberg, Ribbentrop explained the reasons for the German attitude: "At the time," he stated, "I was trying to persuade Japan to attack Singapore, for it seemed impossible to make peace with England and I could not see what military measures we could take to bring this about. In any case, the Fuehrer ordered me to do everything I could by diplomatic means to weaken England so that she would be forced to sue for peace. We thought this could be achieved by Japan's attacking England's key positions in Eastern

¹ The question of a Japanese attack on Singapore was first broached at the conference between Hitler and the Naval and Army chiefs on 27th December (*Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1940, p. 137); it was raised again two weeks later (*Ibid*, 1941, p. 13). See also Ribbentrop's talk with Oshima, the Japanese Ambassador, on 23rd February, 1941 (*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., III pp. 371-5; *N.C.A.*, IV, pp. 469-75); Base Order No. 24 from O.K.W., dated 5th March, concerning collaboration with Japan (*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., III, pp. 375-7; *N.C.A.*, I, p. 848); meeting between Hitler and the military chiefs on 18th March (*Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., III, p. 378; *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1941, p. 37; *N.C.A.*, VI, p. 966); Ribbentrop-Matsuoka talks in Berlin, 27th March (*N.S.R.*, pp. 287-8), 28th March (*N.S.R.*, pp. 299, 302-3), and 29th March (*N.S.R.*, pp. 303-11; *N.C.A.*, IV, pp. 520-2); Hitler-Matsuoka talks in Berlin, 27th March, 1941 (*N.S.R.*, p. 295) and 4th April (*N.S.R.*, pp. 313-16). The attack on Singapore was considered at an interview between the Emperor of Japan and his Prime Minister, Konoe, on 10th March, 1941; see *The Memoirs of Prince Tominaro Konoe*, Tokio, 1946, p. 17 (and cf. p. 22).

² *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1941, p. 43.

Asia, and that is why I tried to induce Japan to attack Singapore.¹ It is worth mentioning—if only to complete the file of "Hitler Queries"—that Ribbentrop telegraphed to the German Ambassador in Tokio on 10th July, 1941, asking him to request the Japanese Government's immediate intervention against Russia in Siberia.* He was too late. The barrier erected by the Russo-Japanese pact signed at Moscow three months previously was strong enough to withstand Germany's pressure.

There is no need to dwell on the reasons why, from Russia's point of view, Stalin felt it necessary to ask Japan for an agreement. Belgrade fell on 13th April, and after that the war in Yugoslavia was bound to end much sooner than had been foreseen in Moscow. The hour for Germany's show-down with Russia might be correspondingly advanced. If, in spite of Moscow's efforts, the break with Germany occurred, it was supremely important to avoid a war on two fronts, and that was the main purpose of the pact of 13th April. From Japan's point of view, it cleared the way for an attack on Britain and the United States in the Far East and removed the danger that the Russians would take her in the rear. Stalin had already told Matsuoka when he first passed through Moscow that "*Soviet Russia had never got on well with Great Britain and never would*"* and he now reassured his partner by saying that he was "*a convinced adherent of the Axis and an opponent of England and America*"⁴ Mr. Grew, the United States Ambassador

¹ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., X, pp. 396-7.

² *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., III pp. 384-5 ; N.C.A.,

V 25-1-2

³ N.-S.R., p. 397.

⁴ N.-S. R., p. 324.

in Tokio, thought at the time that " the pact will tend to stimulate and support the Japanese extremists who advocated a vigorous prosecution of the southward advance because it guarantees Soviet neutrality in case Japan gets into war with a third country (i.e., the United States)."¹ America's fears were expressed in a United Press message of 14th April: " The general opinion is that Britain and the United States have suffered a diplomatic defeat in the Moscow pact between Japan and Soviet Russia. For it is thought in Washington that, now her own frontiers with the Soviet Union have been guaranteed, Japan will press on with a policy of expansion in the South Seas." That is what in fact occurred eight months later. Russia's attitude remained the same even after the German attack, and she only changed it just before Japan capitulated so as to secure a share of the spoils in the Far East.

Russia vainly attempts to Avoid War

By making use of the violently anti-British circles to which Matsuoka belonged, Stalin steered Japan away from the " Maritime Provinces " of Asiatic Russia and encouraged her to expand in the direction of the " South Seas." All that was needed now was for him to play his cards well in the West. Stalin was well aware how serious was the danger threatening European Russia, but he still hoped he could counteract it. To do so, he employed every weapon in his armoury, however unimportant.

When Matsuoka left Moscow a few hours after signing the pact of friendship, Stalin went with Molotov to see

¹ Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Tears in Japan*, p. 330.

him off at the station. This was a surprising and indeed an unprecedented occurrence. He turned it to good advantage by coming up to von Schulenburg, throwing his arm round his shoulders, and saying " *We must remain friends and you must now do everything to that end !* " To the German Military Attache, Hans Krebs, who was quite dumbfounded at being addressed directly by the ruler of Russia, he repeated " *We will remain friends with you—whatever happens.* " ¹ Nobody missed the significance of this demonstration. Two weeks later von Schulenburg again reminded Hitler of the scene at the station on 13th April when Stalin had wished " to demonstrate publicly his intention to collaborate with the Axis. " ²

From that moment the Kremlin's professions of " loyalty " to Germany and its attempts to break through her sinister silence became more frequent. Berlin was greatly surprised when, on 25th April, the Russians suddenly accepted Germany's plan for the delimitation of the frontier between the Igorka river and the Baltic, for up till then Molotov had fought it with his usual stubbornness. ³ On 20th April the Naval chiefs drew Hitler's attention to the fact that Russia's attitude had changed and was now markedly pro-German. ⁴

On 3rd May Russia officially recognised the pro-German Government of Rashid Ali el Kailani in Irak the day after he had attacked the British aerodrome at Bassara. On 6th May, 1941, Stalin became head of the Government. Berlin understood very well what this

¹ N.-S.R., p. 324. On this incident, see also H. C. Cassidy, *Moscow Dateline*, pp. 11-12 ; G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, pp. 157-8 ; and the Tass communique of 14th April.

² N.-S.R., p. 332.

³ N.-S.R., pp. 325-6.

⁴ *Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs*, 1941, p. 48.

meant in terms of foreign policy. Stalin wished to reassure Hitler by showing him that he intended to continue his German policy of 1939 and do everything he could to avoid a conflict.¹

The German Naval chiefs interpreted this move as meaning that Stalin wished to concentrate the executive power in his own hands and to avoid a clash with Germany.¹ The diplomats stationed in Moscow were all of the opinion that this was not a "cabinet de guerre" but a cabinet of "pacte a quatre," the four being the U.S.S.R., Germany, Italy and Japan.⁸ The German Naval Attache at Moscow considered Stalin to be "the pivot of German-Soviet collaboration"⁴.

Next day Vyshinsky summoned the Yugoslav minister, Gavrilovic, and asked him to leave Russia, an action which was taken without any prompting from Germany. The same thing happened to the diplomatic representatives of Belgium and Norway, both countries occupied by the Wehrmacht; and Greece's turn came at the beginning of June.⁶ All this was a dead loss, since in Berlin the Press was instructed not to refer to these moves.⁶ The Soviet Government had meanwhile accredited M. Bogomolov to Marshal Pétain, this time with the rank of Ambassador.⁷

To avoid war Stalin, as von Schulenburg told Hitler on 28th April, "was prepared to make further concessions"*

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 335-9-

² N. C. A., VI, D. 998.

³ H. C. Cassidy, *Moscow Dateline*, p. 19.

⁴ N.C.A., VI, p. 998 (10th May, 1941).

⁵ The Czechoslovak minister, M. Fierlinger, had already been asked to leave in December, 1940.

⁶ L. Simoni, *Berlino Ambasciata d'Italia*, p. 234.

⁷ He presented his letters of credence to Vichy on 34th April, 1941.

⁸ N.-S.R., p. 332.

A pro-Soviet American journalist living in Moscow summed up the position as follows : " *We all knew the Soviet Union wanted peace at almost any price, would make almost any concession, even unasked, to escape war*"¹

Economic Collaboration continues to the End

The Soviet leaders' anxiety to provide Germany with proofs of their goodwill was strikingly displayed, and on a lavish scale, in their trading arrangements. Since 10th January, 1941, the U.S.S.R. and Germany had made a new agreement.¹ There had been some difficulties at first, but they were soon smoothed out. After the beginning of March, 1941, the Russians became more conciliatory and delivered hundreds of thousands of tons of grain in advance of their contracts for September.¹ They were less pressing for the goods Germany was to send in exchange⁴ and promised to supply during the following year five million tons of grain,⁵ which the Wehrmacht would not, therefore, have to go and find for itself in the Ukraine. The transit traffic through Siberia of raw materials imported by Germany from Eastern Asia proceeded " favourably," the Russians even placing at Germany's disposal a special freight train for rubber⁰ on the Manchurian border. In April substantial deliveries were made by the Russians: 208,000 tons of grain, 90,000 tons of petroleum, 8,300 tons of cotton, 6,340 tons of non-ferrous metals (copper,

¹ H. C. Cassidy, *Moscow Dateline*, p. 7.

² It was the third, and succeeded those of 19th August, 1939, and nth February, 1940.

³ N.-S.R., pp. 318-19.

⁴ N.-S. R., p. 327.

⁵ N.-S.R., p. 332.

⁶ N.-S.R.,p. 318.

tin and nickel). During the same month 2,000 tons of rubber crossed Siberia for Germany in regular trains and another 2,000 tons in special trains.¹ General Thomas, in his historical survey of German war economy, observed that " the Russians delivered their supplies on schedule right up to the start of the attack, and even during the last few days cargoes of rubber from the Far East *were rushed through by express train.*"²

The situation was such that on 15th May Schnurre, the German negotiator, informed his Government that they could in future ask Russia to supply Germany's "*food and raw material requirements beyond the extent now contracted for*"³ and be sure of a favourable reply.

" *Alea Jacta Est*"

But Hitler's decision had already been made several months before. Nothing was to cause him to change it. Von Schulenburg was much disheartened when he returned to Moscow on 30th April, after a fortnight's stay in Berlin. He had seen Hitler and had gained the impression that the *die was cast*. He himself was strongly opposed to the war and even tried to warn the Soviet Government of the danger in a conversation with Dekanozov.⁴

¹ N.-S.R., pp. 339-41.

² *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, I I I , p. 363 ; and cf. N.C.A., I V , p. 1083.

³ N.-S.R., p.341.

⁴ Interrogation by the American Mission. Von Schulenburg later became involved in the anti-Hitler plot of July, 1944, in which some members of his family played an active part ; he too lost his life in the brutal repression ordered by Himmler. His evidence is therefore above suspicion, for its strongly pro-Soviet bias is unmistakable and resulted from what he conceived to be Germany's best interests. His correspondence is of unquestionable historic value.

Those who knew Russia well did everything they could to dissuade Hitler from such a dangerous enterprise, but without success ; in Berlin, there were Weizsaecker, von Toppelskirch and Schnurre, and in Moscow, Gustav Hilger, who was in full agreement with his Ambassador.

Stalin and his colleagues were under no illusion about the gravity of the situation. There were too many sinister portents which gave cause for anxiety. In his speech in Berlin on 4th May Hitler did not so much as mention Russia. And what was the significance of Rudolf Hess's mysterious adventure when he parachuted into Britain on 13th May? The increasing German troop concentrations on the frontier could not have escaped their notice. Germany's preparations were already well advanced in every field¹ and the tempo quickened at the end of May. The timing of the various moves was then fixed.¹ On 12th June German ships in Russian ports were ordered to leave " for fictitious reasons."* The big conference of Hitler and his military chiefs which had been summoned on 6th June took place on the 14th.⁴ On the 15th they decided to allow attacks on Russian submarines immediately, within a line running to the north of Poland.⁵ The final talks with the Finnish General Staff began on 25th May and were actively pursued.⁶ On 23rd May Hitler briefed

¹ See pp. 189-91.

² *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, VII, p. 276 ; N.C.A., VI, pp. 858-67.

³ N.C.A., VI, p. 1000.

⁴ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, IV, p. 407 ; N.C.A., VI, pp. 909-11.

⁵ N.C.A., VI, p. 1001 ; *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., XIV, p. 195.

⁶ N.C.A., VI, p. 858 ; *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, etc., VII, p. 313, General Buschenhagen's evidence.

General Ritter von Schobert on the steps to be taken to supplement "Operation Barbarossa" in Rumania,¹ and on 8th June he had a final discussion on this subject with General Antonescu in Munich. In June Goering put the finishing touches to his directives dealing with the economic organisation of the war zone,² and Rosenberg on his side infused a final dose of doctrine into the officials appointed to handle problems in the East.³

The Russians were therefore compelled to take counter-measures, although they concealed them as well as they could. The Red Army manoeuvres took place in several districts at the beginning of June (Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa, White Russia, Moscow, and the Crimea). To keep the troop movements as secret as possible, on 17th May the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs sent a note to the accredited diplomatic and consular missions prohibiting all movement in certain parts of the country ; members of their staffs were allowed to travel only after giving previous notice. Russia's military measures were nevertheless strictly defensive.⁴ The factories near the western frontier of the U.S.S.R. were moved farther east.

Moscow received numerous warnings from London and Washington. At the beginning of January, 1941., Sumner Welles, the Under-Secretary of State, passed on to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington information

¹ N.C.A., VI, p. 877-8.

² N.C.A., V I I , p. 539-40.

³ June 20th-21st, N.C.A., I I I , pp. 716-17 and V I , p. 855 ; III, pp. 693-5. A few days after the attack, on 28th June, Rosenberg drew up a report on his activities since his appointment as Reich Commissar, *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, III, pp. 358-61 and N.C.A., III, pp. 695-701.

⁴ D. C. Poole, article previously quoted from *Foreign Policy*, p. 24 of the off-print; N.C.A., V I , p. 1002, under the date of 21st June.

which had readied his Government about the German preparations for attacking the U.S.S.R., and he gave him further details on 20th March.¹ In his broadcast speech on the evening of 22nd June Winston Churchill later recalled the "clear and precise" warnings which he had given Stalin on the same subject. This was not always an easy thing to do. Shortly before hostilities broke out Sir Stafford Cripps—from whom a curious prophecy had reached the ears of the German Naval Attache in Moscow on 24th April²—requested an interview with Stalin in order to give him certain information. "It was declined. He asked for an interview with Molotov. It was declined. He finally succeeded in seeing Vyshinsky . . . and the general impression was that Vyshinsky went as far as to indicate he considered Sir Stafford a 'provocateur,' for implying that Germany would turn against her Soviet friends."³

This was because right up to the last minute the Soviet leaders were hoping to dodge the blow. Stalin could not conceive why Hitler, after going to such lengths to avoid a second front, should wish to create one himself just when the situation was, on the whole, less in his favour than in 1939.⁴

¹ *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-41*, Washington, 1942, p. 105 ; Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1944, p. 251.

² *N.C.A.*, VI, p. 997. Sir Stafford Cripps forecast the German attack for 22nd June . . .

³ H. C. Cassidy, *Moscow Dateline*, p. 20.

⁴ In a statement to the American Press on 31st December! 1941, M. Litvinov said : " My Government did receive, warnings as to the treacherous intentions of Hitler with regard to the Soviet Union, but it did not take them seriously and this not because it believed in the sacredness of Hitler's signature, or did not believe him capable of violating the treaties he signed, and the oft-repeated solemn promises he made, but because it considered that it would have been madness on his part to undertake war in the east against

So the Russians simultaneously threw out their last life-belts and speeded up their military preparations. In a note circulated by Tass on 13th June and drafted by Stalin personally, they indulged in a violent attack on Sir Stafford Cripps, accusing him of starting false rumours—such as the story of German troop concentrations on the frontier—which were "*a clumsy propaganda manoeuvre of the forces hostile to the U.S.S.R. and Germany and interested in spreading the war.*"¹

Hitler and Ribbentrop knew very well that Russia would not attack Germany and had declared as much several times in their talks with Matsuoka.² On 28th April Hitler explained to von Schulenburg, who was doing his best to reassure him on this point, that he had no fear of any danger from Russia.³ But he did not so much as mention the Tass note of 13th June and it was on his orders that it was not even reproduced in the German Press.⁴

Did the Soviet leaders make any further attempts between 13th and 22nd June to pierce the stubborn silence of the Nazi chiefs? According to the "revelations" of an American journalist, Molotov is supposed to have paid a secret visit to Berlin in order to inform Ribbentrop of the political, economic and territorial concessions which Russia was prepared to make to avoid war.⁵ An Italian diplomat attached to the Berlin

such a powerful land as ours, before finishing off his war in the west." L. Fischer, *The Great Challenge*, London, Cape, 1947, p. 32.

¹ N.-S.R., p. 345.

² N.-S.R., pp. 285, 291, 299, 303.

³ N.-S.R., p. 332.

⁴ L. Simoni, *Berlino Ambasciata d'Italia*, p. 239; A. Rosso, *Obiettivo e metodi della politica estera d'Italia*, p. 28.

⁵ Miss Dorothy Thomson. See the *Gazette de Lausanne*, 1st August, 1946.

Embassy, noted in his diary several rumours alleging that Stalin himself was expected in Berlin, where he was to make a last attempt at conciliation.¹ But these suppositions are not borne out by anything in the German documents so far published, or by the other sources consulted.

All that is certain is that the Soviet leaders were ready to come to an agreement with Germany until just before the outbreak of war, and that they were willing to pay the necessary price for it. They even made a last attempt on the evening of 21st June.² But in vain. In the early hours of 22nd June German troops crossed the Russian frontier, while von Schulenburg, with death in his heart, called on Molotov and carried out his Government's instructions by reading out what amounted to a declaration of war. Molotov, very pale, listened in silence, and betrayed his emotion only when he asked the German Ambassador this question : " *Do you think we have deserved this ?* "³

Sir Stafford Cripps had left Moscow on 10th June quite disheartened because Russia was prepared to go to any lengths to avoid war. " *He was apparently a beaten man. He expected never to return to Moscow* " relates H. C. Cassidy, adding that " *it remained for the Germans to make his mission in Russia a success* " *

It was Germany, therefore, who forced Russia into war and into an unwilling alliance with the Western democracies. If Germany had not attacked, Russia would have continued the policy of the August-September pacts of 1939 for a long time to come. This was

¹ L. Simoni, *Berlino Ambasciato d'Italia*, pp. 232, 234, 235.

² *N.-S.R.*, pp. 355-6.

³ G. Gafencu, *Prelude to the Russian Campaign*, p. 212.

⁴ H. C. Cassidy, *Moscow Dateline*, p. 20.

stated by Stalin himself on 3rd July, 1941, in, his first speech after the outbreak of hostilities. " It was Fascist Germany who, treacherously and without warning, violated the non-aggression pact which she had signed with the U.S.S.R. in 1939 . . . *The war has been forced on us.*"¹ Anthony Eden pointed out to the House of Commons on 24th June, 1941, how opposed had been the attitudes of Britain and Russia : " We would have welcomed an agreement with Russia, but unfortunately the opportunity of reaching one never presented itself" because " the U.S.S.R. scrupulously observed its pact with Germany/' During his visit to the Soviet capital Harry Hopkins remarked that there the invasion was regarded " as the treachery of a partner who had suddenly revealed himself as a rabid dog." Stalin told him that his policy towards Germany had been " straight-forward and sincere " and that Hitler had betrayed him.¹ At the Nuremberg trial Rudenko, chief prosecutor for the U.S.S.R., declared that " the original documents of the Hitlerite Government now made public definitely show, to the whole world and to history, the ludicrous falsity of Hitler's propaganda about the *preventive* character of the war against the U.S.S.R." ¹

The Western democracies did not hold Stalin's past against him. As early as the evening of 22nd June Winston Churchill, in the name of the British people, promised unqualified support for Russia now she was attacked by Hitler : " No one," he said, " has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have been for the last twenty-five years. I will unsay no word

¹ J. Stalin, *On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, Hutchinson, London, pp. 6 and 7.

² Louis Fischer, *The Great Challenge*, p. 43.

³ *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, V I I, p. 169.

that I have spoken about it. But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding . . . I see the Russian soldiers standing on the threshold of their native land, guarding the fields which their fathers have tilled from time immemorial . . . But now I have to declare the decision of His Majesty's Government . . . We have but one aim and one single, irrevocable purpose. We are resolved to destroy Hitler and every vestige of the Nazi regime. From this nothing will turn us—nothing. We will never parley, we will never negotiate with Hitler or any of his gang. We shall fight him by land, we shall fight him by sea, we shall fight him in the air, until with God's help we have rid the earth of his shadow and liberated its peoples from his yoke. Any man or state who fights on against Nazidom will have our aid. Any man or state who marches with Hitler is our foe."

For his part, President Roosevelt intervened in Tokio on 5th July with a request that Japan should not join Germany in the war against Russia.¹

For Russia, this was the beginning of a dramatic interlude which brought her, very much against her will, into the anti-German camp. Stalin steered his country with a firm hand, waiting for the opportunity which the end of the war, and indeed the war itself, would give him to revive once again his Rapallo policy of collaboration with Germany. But, thanks to the blindness of his allies, he is resuming it under very different and far more favourable conditions, and it will become only the starting point of a policy of even vaster expansion and world hegemony.

¹ Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Tears in Japan*, pp. 343-4.

CHAPTER XI

By way of conclusion

IF it is not yet possible to write a full history of German-Soviet relations between 1939 and 1941, we have at our disposal such a mass of documents and of vital and incontrovertible evidence that the following points can now be taken as definitely established

1. Stalin's decision to avoid becoming involved in the new world war, and to reach agreement with Germany in fulfilment of this aim, dates from 10th March, 1939, at the latest.

2. On 17th April, 1939, Moscow took the initiative in "officially" exploring the possibilities of a *rapprochement* with Germany; by dismissing Litvinov on 4th May, Stalin made known to the Nazi leaders that he had firmly decided to reach an understanding with them; on 20th May Molotov steered the talks with Germany on to the *political* plane. It was Moscow which took the lead in proposing both the pact of non-aggression and the secret protocol which was to form an "integral part" of it.

3. The Moscow talks with the Western democracies, although a kind of re-insurance in case the attempt at a *rapprochement* with Hitler's Germany failed, **began when Stalin had** already decided to do all he could to reach an understanding, and his only reason **for continuing them**, especially during **the last stage, was to force Hitler to pay a higher price for his collaboration.**

4. The certainty that he would not have to reckon with a front in the East was one of the determining factors in Hitler's war policy of 1939-40 ; the fact that it was possible for Germany to fight on a single front was one of the causes of the defeat of France.

5. The German-Soviet non-aggression pact of 23rd August, 1939, was a pact of aggression against Poland.

6. The German-Soviet agreements of August and September, 1939, were based on the partition of Eastern Europe.

7. Formal effect was given to this partition in three secret protocols : the protocol of 23rd August, on which the other two were based and which gave Estonia, Latvia, Eastern Poland (east of the " four-river " line) and Bessarabia to Russia, and the rest of Poland to Germany ; the protocol of 28th September, in which Germany assigned Lithuania to Russia, except for a small strip of territory in the south-west, and received in exchange another slice of Polish territory (the province of Lublin and part of the province of Warsaw) ; the protocol of 10th January, 1941, in which Germany gave up a small strip of Lithuanian territory in return for economic advantages. The text of the three secret protocols has been discovered and published.

8. It is untrue that Russia invaded Poland in September, 1939, in order to defend the territory assigned to her by the secret protocol of 23rd August against the German advance ; the Russians intervened at the express invitation of Germany and took over this territory in full agreement and in close collaboration with the German Government and Army,

9. Under pressure from Stalin, the German Government gave up any attempt to permit the survival of a

small independent Polish state. This resulted in the creation by the Reich of the " Government General of Poland," and the future status of the country was settled on the basis of a " fourth partition." c

10. Political collaboration between the U.S.S.R. and Germany was very close between the end of August, 1939, and the summer of 1940. It was shown, in particular, by the attitude adopted by all the parties belonging to the Communist International. Their campaign was directed exclusively against Britain and France, their activities ranging from " neutrality " in Germany to defeatism and sabotage of the national defence and the war in France.

11. There was also political collaboration at Government level in several fields :

(a) Campaign for " immediate peace," which started officially with the German-Soviet agreements of 28th September, 1939. This gave rise, in particular, to the letter of 1st October from the French Communist deputies to President Herriot, advocating Hitler's proposals and another Munich.

(b) Soviet protests against the British blockade.

(c) Soviet pressure on Turkey not to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with Britain and France.

(d) Soviet Government and Press campaign against Roosevelt's proposed " Lend-Lease " bill of aid to Britain.

12. The Soviet Government made every effort to work in close collaboration with Fascist Italy on the basis of the following agreement: Russian hegemony in the Black Sea and Italian hegemony in the Mediterranean. Although backed by Mussolini, this agreement could not be carried through because of the German veto.

13. Russia's economic collaboration enabled the Reich to break the British blockade and to fight the war under conditions more favourable than in 1914-18 ; the Russians continued to collaborate up to the eve of the German attack on 22nd June, 1941.

14. Friction between Germany and the U.S.S.R. began during the summer of 1940, immediately after the German victory in the West ; it was then that Hitler decided not to allow the Russians to expand beyond the Baltic countries and Bessarabia, which they had just occupied, and above all to prevent them from seizing the Balkans and the Dardanelles.

15. The Three Power Pact signed in Berlin on 27th September, 1940, between Germany, Italy and Japan was directed fundamentally against Britain and the U.S.A.

16. In the hope of inducing Russia to abandon her designs on the Balkans and the Dardanelles, the German leaders planned a new partition of the world based on the defeat of Britain and the disintegration of the British Empire. After joining the Three Power Pact, Russia was to receive a new *Lebensraum* in Asia, in the direction of the Indian Ocean. This plan was discussed by Hider, Ribbentrop and Molotov during their conversations in Berlin on 12th and 13th November, 1940.

17. The Soviet chiefs agreed to this plan in principle, but without renouncing their ambitions in the West. Molotov explained their attitude in his note of 25th November, 1940; they agreed that Russia should join the Three Power Pact and enjoy the advantages to be derived from it in the Middle East, but proposed a number of secret protocols, the main points of which were that Russia would be allowed to occupy

Finland, seize Bulgaria and set up bases in the Dardanelles, all within the framework of the new four-power alliance.

18. The German leaders were not prepared to pay such a high price for Russia's adherence to the Three Power Pact, and it was at this point that Germany's war against Russia became inevitable.

19. The break between Hitler's Germany and Soviet Russia was a break between two imperialist programmes. It had its origin in the same conflict of interests over the Balkans and the Dardanelles as had already caused a breach between the Germany of William II and the Russia of the Czars in 1914.

20. The Russo-Japanese pact of 13th April, 1941, was a compromise intended to draw Japan away from the Soviet frontiers in the Far East and to force her into collision with Britain and the United States in the Pacific.

21. From the beginning of May, 1941, the Soviet Government made strenuous efforts, through a whole series of measures, to convince Germany of its desire for peace and co-operation, political as well as economic ; but from then until the outbreak of war it was unable to renew contact with the German Government, which avoided all discussion.

22. The German-Soviet war was the outcome of a unilateral decision on Germany's part, since Russia had done everything to avoid it. Russia joined the democratic front in June, 1941, simply and solely because Germany forced her to do so at the point of the sword.

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